DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 539 CS 509 664

TITLE	Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (80th, Chicago, Illinois, July 30-August 2, 1997): Mass Communication and Society.
INSTITUTION	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.
PUB DATE	1997-07-00
NOTE	321p.; For other sections of these Proceedings, see CS 509 657-676.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC13 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Athletics; Comparative Analysis; Immigration; Internet; *Journalism; *Mass Media Effects; *Mass Media Role; Media Research; *News Media; Political Attitudes; Presidential Campaigns (United States); Public Relations
IDENTIFIERS	Faculty Attitudes; Generation X; Issue Salience; *Media Ethics; *Political Advertising; Television News Magazines

ABSTRACT

The Mass Communication and Society section of the Proceedings contains the following 11 papers: "A Cynical Press: Coverage of the 1996 Presidential Campaign" (Sandra H. Dickson, Cynthia Hill, Cara Pilson, and Suzanne Hanners); "JMC Faculty Divided: Majority Finds Dozen Uses for Research" (Fred Fedler, Maria Cristina Santana, Tim Counts, and Arlen Carey); "Consequences of Negative Political Advertising Exposure" (Wayne Wanta, James B. Lemert, and Tien-tsung Lee); "Sensational: A Comparison of Content and Presentation Styles of the '60 Minutes" and 'Dateline NBC' Television News Magazines" (Patrick J. Sutherland); "Issue Salience and the Third-Person Effect: Perceptions of Illegal Immigration in a Southwestern Region" (Frances R. Matera and Michael B. Salwen); "Truth and Consequences: Media Ethics and the Movement to Minimizing Harm" (Sharon Logsdon Yoder and Glen L. Bleske); "Public Information and Public Dialogues: An Analysis of the Public Relations Behavior of Newspaper Ombudsmen" (Craig Sanders and Neil Nemeth); "Who's Responsible for Journalism?" (John H. McManus); "Of Sports Pages and Bad Attitudes: An Investigation of the Relationship between Attention to Sports Media and Attitudes towards Women's Sports" (Lisa M. Weidman); "Trusting the Media and 'Joe from Dubuque' Online: Comparing Internet and Traditional Sources on Media Credibility Measures" (Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye); and "The Legitimization of Generation X: A Case Study in Status Conferral" (Rebecca Chamberlin). Individual papers contain references. (CR)

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

(80th, Chicago, Illinois, July 30-August 2, 1997):

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A Cynical Press: Coverage of the 1996 Presidential Campaign

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Association for Education in
Journalism and Mass Communication
Mass Communication and Society Division
August 1997

A CYNICAL PRESS: COVERAGE OF THE 1996 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

ABSTRACT

An analysis of 332 *CBS* and *Washington Post* stories on the 1996 presidential campaign revealed coverage which was cynical in nature. Three factors suggest this to be the case: (1) the news organizations used overwhelmingly a "game" rather than "policy" schema in campaign coverage; (2) the sample, while chiefly objective in tone, contained few positive stories and a high percentage which were negative; and, perhaps most importantly, (3) when motives were attributed to the candidates, they were almost exclusively categorized as self-serving and more often than not the reporter served as the source for the motive statement.

A CYNICAL PRESS: COVERAGE OF THE 1996 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Media scholars and critics have described press coverage of presidential campaigns as increasingly negative and cynical in tone. Patterson (1994) in his extensive quantitative analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek* coverage of presidential candidates found during the 1960s "candidates received largely favorable news coverage; whereas, "today, their coverage is mostly negative" (p. 20). In a similar vein, the Annenberg Public Policy Center (1996) analyzed news coverage of four presidential campaigns--1960, 1980, 1988 and 1992--and concluded: "Press coverage suggests that campaign discourse is more negative than it actually is" (p. 5). Likewise, Lichter and Noyes (1995) in their analysis of television news coverage of presidential campaigns, observed that: "Likely winners are depicted as dangerous manipulators of an unwary public, while likely losers are dismissed as incompetent bumblers" (p. 168).

Moreover, Patterson (1994) found public opinion polls since the 60s reveal voter attitudes toward presidential candidates have been largely lockstep with news coverage; in other words, as the press portrayal of candidates became more negative and cynical so too did public opinion. Gordon contends that considering the cynical tone of press coverage it is not surprising a "self-fulfilling prophecy has taken place: The public has little trust in government. Ironically, the public also has little trust in media (Gordon, 1995)."

By examining the degree to which "cynicism" is found in sample *CBS* and *Washington Post* news reports on the 1996 presidential campaign, this study may shed light on the nature of press cynicism and its implications for the political process. Fallows (1996) suggests this preoccupation with "the cynical game of politics threatens public life itself, by implying day after day that the political sphere is mainly an arena in which ambitious politicians struggle for dominance, rather than a structure in which citizens can deal with worrisome collective problems (p. 31)." A chorus of other scholars have echoed the same theme (e.g., Bennett, 1982; Entman, 1989; Rosen, 1992; Adatto, 1993; Graber, 1987 & 1992; Hallin, 1992 & 1994; Patterson, 1994 ; Gordon, 1995; Lichter & Noyes, 1995; Schudson, 1995)

In measuring cynicism, this study focused on two elite news organizations: *CBS* and the *Washington Post*. Media critics and scholars have suggested television news is more susceptible to cynicism than the printed press because of the networks' heavy reliance on the contrived "events" that a campaign produces (e.g., Robinson, 1976; Ewen, 1988; Taylor, 1990; Auletta, 1992; Adatto, 1993; Hallin, 1994; Fallows, 1996). Furthermore, television news was selected for analysis because the majority of American voters rely on television for their political news (The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1996, p. 6).

The *Washington Post* was selected for two reasons: (1) to see what cynicism exists in a preeminent print source for presidential campaign news and (2) in order to gain insight into what differences, if any, may exist between print and television media. In regard to the latter, Sigelman and Bullock (1991) argue those media critics who hold television news as more culpable in defective political coverage than newspapers are overlooking a significant body of research suggesting there is little difference in print and broadcast portrayal of political campaigns. Indeed studies by Patterson (1976), Graber (1980) and Robinson and Sheehan (1983) support the claim that broadcast and print media cover campaigns in very similar fashions. A study of recent campaign coverage also suggests this to be the case (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 1996). However, none of these studies specifically measured the construct of cynicism.

What is Press Cynicism?

Symptoms of press cynicism may be found in what Carey (1986) describes as American journalism's preoccupation with explaining the motives of political actors. In his words: "Motive explanations end up portraying a world in which people are driven by desires no more complicated than greed" (pp. 180-81). Carey's concept of "motive explanations" is a useful lens through which to view cynicism, primarily because it enables us to distinguish cynical from skeptical reporting and posit why the latter is to be preferred.[1]

Skeptical reporting is grounded in realism and stands in marked contrast to cynical coverage. Coffey (1996) notes skepticism questions authority "but doesn't deny that an elected official can act from authentic statesmanship" (p. 7). On the other hand, when journalists reduce all official actions chiefly to self interest, they employ the language of cynicism. As Stiver notes: "Cynicism makes things worse than they are in that it makes permanent the current condition, leaving us with no hope of transcending it" (1994, p. 13). Ettema and Glasser (1994) see journalism's use of irony, characterized in part by language which exposes the discrepancy between what public officials say and what they do or between image and reality, as likely to evolve into a cynical approach which offers no possibility of improving the political process.

Cynicism, unlike skepticism, chiefly depicts a candidate's actions as opportunistic and nothing more than a transparent ploy to garner votes. Reporters' cynicism, according to Fallows (1996), contributes to a sense of hopelessness among voters. In his words:

> Mainstream journalism has fallen into the habit of portraying public life in America as a race to the bottom, in which one group of conniving, insincere politicians ceaselessly tries to outmaneuver another. The great problem for American democracy in the 1990s is that people barely trust elected leaders or the entire

legislative system to accomplish anything of value (p. 7).

Press cynicism, as defined in this study, is exhibited in motive explanations as well as in political coverage which is very negative in tone and adopts what Patterson (1994) calls a "game" rather than "policy" schema. The game schema, according to Patterson, is one in which "candidates are continually adjusting to the dynamics of the race and their position in it. Since it can almost always be assumed that the candidates are driven by a desire to win, their actions can hence be interpreted as an effort to acquire votes (pp. 60-61)." News coverage characterized by these three factors may, according to Hallin (1994), discourage the public from any political involvement.

Causes of Cynicism

Taylor (1990) suggests that because of the corrupt political policies and actions of the '60s and '70s, Americans became more cynical and television played an important role in their transformation. He observes that "television delivered the news about these policies in a medium--and to a unique new mass audience--where cynicism and anti-institutionalism tend to flourish" (p. 246). Adatto (1993) describes the paradox of television journalism when it comes to political reporting: a need to perpetuate entertaining images and a need to destroy them. In describing 1988 campaign coverage she observes:

> On the one hand, the growing entertainment orientation of network news compelled reporters and producers to get the

> best possible picture, even if this made them accomplices in artifice; on the other hand, the traditional documentary ambition of television journalism compelled them to puncture the picture, to expose the image as an image (p. 3).

Levy (1981) notes when journalists, print or broadcast, are forced because of competition values to cover contrived events, such as political campaigns, a phenomenon called "disdained news" results. In his words:

> Disdained news departs from 'objective' news in that disdained stories frequently contain editorially judgmental words or phrases which clearly suggest the journalist's point of view about the tainted phenomenon (p. 28).

In essence, these scholars and others suggest that journalists are dependent on political "pseudo-events" or images for their news reports but resentful of their reliance on what they know to be manipulative images (Boorstin, 1971). Not surprisingly, this kind of symbiotic relationship might breed cynical reporters. As Rosen (1992) notes: "Resenting their regular manipulation by politicians and handlers, journalists strike back when they can, trying to humble the people they must otherwise beg for news" (p. 17).

Numerous studies have analyzed the role of the press in the political process and how the relationship between reporters and politicians can lead to cynicism. For example, Adatto's (1993) comparison of campaign reporting of the 1968 and 1988 elections revealed the degree to which television journalism has become increasingly driven by images and the ensuing negative consequences. According to Adatto:

> Those responsible for network coverage in the 1960's maintain that it was different in their day. When television pictures functioned more as documents than as visually compelling images, there was less need for complicity with the campaigns, and also less need to puncture the pictures (p. 90).

However, the thrust of her research is broad in nature. It focuses on the techniques and consequences of image manipulation rather than the specific phenomenon of press cynicism. Indeed, much of the research concerning press coverage of presidential campaigns has described (or deduced) cynicism largely through analyses of the amounts of "good" and "bad" press each candidate receives and through examination of the paradigm shift from objective to mediated or more interpretive journalism.[2]

Although the amount of "good" and "bad" press can be used as one measure of cynicism, this categorization alone is so broad it offers only partial insight into this construct. Whereas one might argue that all cynical statements are negative, one could not contend that all negative statements are cynical in nature. For example, it is surely a negative statement or "spin" if a reporter states that many Americans perceive President Bill Clinton as having an incoherent foreign policy. It is not, however, a cynical statement or one that questions his motives or labels his actions as self-serving.

However, three studies are noteworthy for their attempts to tap the construct of cynicism in network news coverage of presidential campaigns. First, Clancey and Robinson's (1985) quantitative analysis of network coverage of the 1984 presidential campaign defined "spin" in a manner which yielded insight into the cynical tone of the press. In their words, spin is:

> the way the correspondent interprets or embellishes the facts in a story. Spin involves tone, the part of the reporting that extends beyond hard news. On October 12, for example, Ronald Reagan's train trip through western Ohio was hard news. But when Dan Rather chose to label the ride "a photo-opportunity train trip, chock full of symbolism and trading on Harry Truman's old turf," Rather added "spin" (p. 28).

Their findings suggested the networks used "only a little innuendo and, when they did, they used it "justifiably" (p. 39). However, Graber's content analysis of 1984 television presidential campaign coverage found in straight news stories "a considerable evidence of various kinds of editorializing spin," and "the thrust was predominantly negative" (1987). A later study by Patterson (1994) echoed the sentiment that cynicism was reflected in journalists' metamorphosis from "silent skeptics" to "vocal cynics" (p. 79). Patterson argues this change was characterized by journalists' adoption of the game schema in political reporting, that is, the theory that "candidates did not merely seek to win; they would do anything to win. Their motives were suspect, their images false, their promises empty" (p. 79). Journalists' cynicism, according to Patterson, was also found in their increasing penchant for interpretive rather than straight descriptive reporting. In his analysis of *New York Times* front-page election stories from 1960 to 1992, he found that the percentage of interpretive stories jumped from 8% to 80% (p. 82).

However, despite the contribution of these studies to understanding press cynicism, their methodologies encompassed news reporting which might be negative in tone and interpretive in nature, but which did not necessarily impugn a candidate's motives as self-serving or opportunistic. The latter difference is important because it better enables us to distinguish skeptical reporting from cynical journalism.

This case study of press coverage of the 1996 presidential campaign attempts to offer an index to cynicism or a more precise description of cynical reporting--one that characterizes this phenomenon as something more than just "negative" or "interpretive" press. The index to cynicism used in this analysis is comprised of three distinct measurements: story schema, tone and candidate motives.

METHOD

Several research questions guided this study:

(1) Will *CBS* and *Washington Post* coverage of the 1996 presidential campaign frame stories largely within a "game" rather than policy" schema," that is, as "a candidate's efforts to woo the voters" (Patterson, p.11, 1994)?

(2) To what extent will the sample stories be positive, negative or objective in tone toward a particular campaign?

(3) When the sample news organizations attribute motive to a candidate, will they likely view it as self-serving rather than not self-serving or a mixed motive?

(4) Will the ratio of self-serving motive statements to non-self serving or mixed be greater in the CBS sample than in the *Washington Post* coverage?

Sample coverage included all campaign news stories (excluding editorials and commentaries) of the two news organizations from September 2-November 4. In the case of the network newscasts, the prime-time programs served as the basis for the analysis. This time period was selected because it begins with the traditional kick-off date for the general election campaign and concludes with election day. Furthermore, by this point in time the presidential field is winnowed to only two contenders and reporters are likely to be very familiar, if not jaded, with the candidate's campaign. The sample total of 332 weekday stories included the following: *CBS* (103) and the *Washington Post* (229). Four independent coders conducted the quantitative analysis. The intercoder reliability results were .75 and above for category reliability calculated using Scott's

Pi; .90 and above for calculations using Holsti's formula.[4]

The content categories used for this analysis were based partly on previous frameworks for measuring political coverage; i.e., particularly that of Patterson's (1994) and Clancey and Robinson's (1985). The categories were as follows:

Story Schema-Each sample news story was categorized according to whether its chief schema was Game, Policy or Other. Game stories were those primarily about how well the candidate is playing the election "game," that is, strategies he is using to win and the likelihood of his success. Policies may be mentioned or discussed but only within the context of how they may increase or decrease the candidate's popularity or chance of winning. Policy stories were largely about proposed or existing domestic or foreign policies (e.g., the flat tax or school prayer) or social, economic or leadership issues. They were not primarily about the candidate's strategies for winning or the likelihood of the candidate winning. Stories in this category gave more than a brief mention of proposed or existing policies; they discussed specific aspects of a policy. The third category, Other, included those stories which did not focus on either policy or the game. For example, a story simply describing the time and place of an upcoming debate would fall into this category.

Tone toward Campaign-Stories were categorized according to whether they were primarily Positive, Negative or Objective toward the campaign of Bill Clinton or Bob Dole.

Motive Statements-This category involved two levels of coding. First, the coders recorded all statements which contained explicit or strongly implied comments regarding a candidate's motives or reasons behind a particular proposal or action. Likewise, the source and target of each motive statement was noted, e.g., a *CBS* reporter impugning the motives of Clinton. Then the coders categorized the motive statements according to whether they were self-serving, not self-serving or mixed. Self-serving statements were those which stated or strongly suggested the candidate's actions were motivated by his attempt to win votes. For example, self-serving motive statements included the following:

CBS reporter-"There's no question why the Pentagon is being deliberately vague about what it plans to do next in Bosnia. With five weeks left before the election, the Clinton administration does not want to be seen as reneging on its pledge to get out of Bosnia by the end of the year."

WP reporter-"The Dole campaign has seized on crime and teenage drug use as defining issues. Polls show that Americans are anxious about both issues, and they also show that many voters do not believe that Dole can balance the budget while cutting taxes."

An example of a motive statement categorized as not self-serving was found in this comment by a *Washington Post* reporter: "The Republican nominee called again for a postponement of what he called 'sham' elections [in Bosnia] on September 14 that will 'make a mockery of our principles and commitment to democracy."

The category of mixed motive included those statements which stated or strongly suggested the candidate had additional motives besides self-serving ones. For example, a CBS reporter noted the following: "Today Dole went into New Jersey to address one of his biggest problems: public doubts he can or will deliver his promised tax cuts. So Dole appeared with New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman who Republicans say promised and then delivered a successful tax cut."

FINDINGS

Game v. Policy Schema

Of the sample 332 news stories, the overwhelming majority focused on how the presidential candidates play the political "game." In fact, *CBS* and the *Washington Post* were more than three times as likely to organize a story around a candidate's attempts to woo voters than around a policy position or some other topic. Of the two news organizations, the *Washington Post* had the greatest percentage of stories, or 72%, categorized as "game." However, there were no significant differences between the two news organizations in regard to story schema.

Insert Table 1 about here

Tone of Coverage

Although the majority of sample stories from *CBS* and the *Washington Post* were classified as objective in tone, both news organizations devoted greater negative coverage to incumbent Bill Clinton than to Republican challenger Bob Dole. Furthermore, *CBS* was more negative toward President Clinton (40%) than the *Washington Post* (32%). In fact, *CBS* reporters were almost twice as likely to cast a story about President Clinton in unflattering terms as they were a story about Senator Bob Dole. Even though *CBS* was more negative than the *Washington Post* toward President Clinton, there were no significant differences between the two news samples in regard to the tone of their coverage.

Insert Tables 2 & 3 about here

Self-Serving v. Not Self-Serving Motives

The total sample of 332 news stories included 812 motive statements or descriptions of a candidate's reasons or motives for a particular position or action. The 103 *CBS* reports included 167 motive statements or about 1.5 motive statements per brief story. The 229 *Washington Post* stories had 645 motive statements or about 2.8 motive statements per article. The greater number of motive statements in the *Washington Post* is to be expected considering the longer length of print v. broadcast stories.

Insert Table 4 about here

In the sample stories of both news organizations, journalists were considerably more likely to frame a candidate's motives as self-serving rather than not self-serving or mixed. Furthermore, there were significant differences between *CBS* and the *Washington Post*--the latter having a greater tendency to depict a candidate's motives as self serving. In the case of *CBS*, motive statements were 12 times more likely to be categorized as self-serving than not; whereas, in the *Washington Post*, motive statements were 18 times more likely to be classified as self-serving than any of the other two categories.

Insert Table 5 about here

The majority of all motive statements--self-serving or not--targeted the incumbent Bill Clinton. However, there were significant differences between the two news organizations. The *Washington Post* was more equitable than *CBS* in terms of attributing motives to the two candidates. The *Washington Post* devoted only six percent more of its motive statements to Clinton than Dole, whereas *CBS* devoted 21% more.

Insert Table 6 about here

Source of the Motive Statements

In the total sample of 332 news stories, reporters were the source for the great majority of motive statements; 84% for CBS and 83% for the *Post*. Moreover, both news organizations relied in almost equal amounts (13% and 12% respectively) on the candidates or their representatives for motive statements. There were no significant differences between *CBS* and the *Washington Post* in regard to the source of motive statements.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest *CBS* and the *Washington Post* offered campaign coverage which was cynical in nature. Three factors suggest this to be the case: (1) the news organizations overwhelmingly used a "game" rather than "policy" schema in campaign coverage; (2) the news sample, while chiefly objective in tone, contained few stories which were positive and a high percentage which were negative--the latter was especially true of those stories pertaining to President Clinton; and, perhaps most importantly, (3) when motives were attributed to the candidates, they were almost exclusively categorized as self-serving and more often than not the reporter served as the source for the motive statement.

In regard to the first factor, or that of "game" schema, the finding that *CBS* and the *Post* organized the great majority (66% and 72% respectively) of their stories around a candidate's strategy to win votes supports previous research by Patterson (1994). In the same vein, the Annenberg study of campaign discourse from 1960 to 1992 also found horse race or strategy coverage to be the dominant organizational structure for news (1996, p. 4). This preoccupation with strategy or the horse race is based, according to Patterson, on the prevailing assumption that "candidates are driven by desire to win, their actions can hence be interpreted as an effort to acquire voters" (p. 59). A working assumption or "theory" like the one Patterson describes determines the lens through which a journalist views an event (such as a political campaign). According to Stocking and Gross (1989), when journalists are familiar with an event, they "use well-entrenched theories that prevent them from seeing current events in new or different ways, even when this may be warranted" (p. 23). Media critics like Fallows (1996) contend that journalists, by operating from the theory that all candidates are conniving, produce news coverage "which aggravates today's prevailing despair and cynicism about public life" (p. 65).

The findings concerning the tone of coverage--positive, negative or objective--must be interpreted judiciously and as only one of several contributing factors to cynical coverage. After all, the majority of sample stories were classified as objective in tone and, secondly, some story content for example, scandal) is by its nature negative and journalists would be remiss not to say so. However, as Hallin (1992) notes in his analysis of television news coverage from 1968 to 1988, election coverage has become more negative in tone. Other scholars as well have documented this trend toward more negative campaign coverage (e.g., Graber, 1987 and Patterson, 1994). Certainly this increase could be argued as justifiable to some extent in light of candidates' increasing reliance on consultants and spin doctors. However, the phenomenon of increasing negativity in campaign stories coupled with this study's finding of greater negativity toward the incumbent Clinton than the challenger Dole supports the notion of a cynical press. In the case of CBS, the sample stories were twice as likely to be negative toward Clinton than Dole. If, as scholars argue, the press operates from the assumption that politicians operate only from expediency, not surprisingly, the incumbent bears the brunt of reporters' wrath. The incumbent has more actions, more policies for reporters to scrutinize and to attribute to ambition or self-interest. Previous research documents this tendency of journalism, particularly television, to treat the incumbent more negatively.[5]

Although the *Washington Post* was more negative toward Clinton than Dole, the disparity between the two candidates was much less than that of *CBS*. Perhaps this is a consequence of the *Post* following congress more closely than the television networks and, as a consequence, being more familiar with Dole's record. However, additional studies comparing the print and broadcast news media are necessary to adequately interpret the importance of this finding.

The most significant findings in regard to cynicism relate to the frequency, type, target and source of motive statements. Each of the 332, *CBS* and *Washington Post* stories contained at least one or more (1.5 and 2.8 respectively) motive statements or descriptions of a candidate's reasons or motives for a particular position or action. Even more significant was the fact that these motive statements were overwhelmingly framed as self-serving--86% for *CBS* and 93% for the *Washington Post*. Moreover, more motive statements targeted Clinton rather than Dole and reporters accounted for more than 80% of all motive statements in the sample.

When campaign coverage is examined in light of this study's framework of cynicism--that is, game schema, tone and motive statements--the findings support the contention of those scholars and media critics who claim that political reporting is much less than it could or should be. In Patterson's words:

> The press sends the wrong message. Its claim that candidates make promises in order to win votes is true, but that is only part of the truth. They make them, and work to keep them. What journalists fail to take into account is the constraints affecting these commitments (1994, p. 14).

Indeed, as Patterson points out, previous studies encompassing seven presidencies have found "presidents keep the promises they make as candidates (1994, p. 11).

One other finding of the present study worth noting is newspapers--at least the *Washington Post*--are no less cynical than television news, a notion which runs counter to much of the prevailing wisdom concerning press coverage of political campaigns. In fact, there was a significant difference between the *Washington Post* and *CBS* in regard to type of motive statements--the former being more likely than the latter to label a candidate's motive self serving. Many scholars and critics have described television as being most susceptible to cynicism because of its reliance on images--images that the campaigns orchestrate and manipulate (for example, Adatto, 1993 and Taylor, 1990). In other words, television reporters resent the degree to which they must rely on images and strike back by exposing the artifice of politicians. However, this study found that there was no discernable pattern suggesting that *CBS* was more cynical in its campaign coverage than the *Washington Post*.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the caveats already mentioned, several others should be noted. Although the bulk of sample stories portrayed the campaign as a strategic game, and the reports included more than one motive statement per study and the great majority of those depicted the candidates as self-serving, this study did not measure the impact of these phenomena on viewers and readers. The best indicator we have of audience impact is the work of Patterson (1994) which correlates the negative tone of election coverage with public confidence in presidential candidates. Based upon his analysis of news coverage and public opinion polling since the 1960s, Patterson (1994) notes: "Yet there can be no doubt that the change in the tone of election coverage has contributed to the decline in the public's confidence in those who seek the presidency" (p. 23). Additional studies measuring the direct impact on an audience would add insight into the effects of press cynicism on viewers and readers.

Moreover, to date longitudinal studies have tapped the more general measure of press negativity. Research into the more precise construct of cynicism--or the depiction of candidates' motives as self-serving--needs to be conducted within a historical framework. It would be particularly interesting to see if--as some media critics and scholars contend--the press became more cynical following Vietnam and Watergate.

Finally, research needs to be conducted to determine the degree to which journalists condemn the campaign process but fail to offer viable solutions to the problems they have described. Journalism, when it does not do the latter, may play the role of nihilist in a democratic society--of never rebuilding what it has torn down. As Stivers (1994)observes:

There are always three positions one can take toward

> life: cynicism, idealism, and realism. Cynicism makes things worse than they are in that it makes permanent the current condition, leaving us with no hope of transcending it. Idealism refuses to confront reality as it is but overlays it with sentimentality. What cynicism and idealism share in common is an acceptance of reality as it is but with a bad conscience. The cynic masquerades as a realist; the idealist pretends to be hopeful (p. 13).

Surely journalism, in order to foster political dialogue and an inclusive rather than exclusive political process, needs to approach presidential campaigns within a realistic rather than cynical framework.

1. For a more complete description of what Carey (1986) calls a "motive explanation," see "The Dark Continent of Journalism." In R.K. Manoff and M. Schudson (Eds.), *Reading the news* (pp. 146-196. New York:Pantheon Books.

2. For a discussion of the role television plays in creating and mediating social and political realities, see Nimmo, Dan & Combs, James E. (1983). *Mediated political realities*. New York: Longman.

3. In order to achieve acceptable content reliability, pilot studies were conducted and categories revised over a three-month period. The pilot sample consisted of ABC, CBS and *Washington Post* news stories of the 1996 presidential primaries.

4. See Krippendorff, Klaus. (1981) *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

5. Entman (1989) contends this kind of negative coverage of the incumbent is a consequence of "popularity bias." In his words: "According to popularity bias, presidents should enjoy public esteem. When journalists believe a president is unpopular, relatively negative news tends to arise" (p. 46).

6. For example, Patterson cites the following two studies: Pomper, Gerald & Lederman, Susan. (1976). *Elections in America*. New York: Dodd & Mead and Krukones, Michael G. (1984). *Promises and performance: presidential campaigns as policy predictors*. Lanham, Md: University Press of America.

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Table 1

Story Schema

STORY SCHEMA	CBS n = 103		WP[a] n = 229		TOTAL N = 332	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Game	68	66	165	72	233	70
Policy	18	17	46	20	64	19
Other	17	17	18	8	35	11
TOTAL	103	100	229	100	332	100

[a] *Washington Post*

X^2 (2, N = 332) = 5.52, NS

Table 2

Tone of Clinton Campaign Coverage[a]

TONE	CBS n = 84		WP[b] n = 225		TOTAL n = 309	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Positive	9	11	22	10	31	10
Negative	34	40	71	32	105	34
Objective	41	49	132	59	173	56
TOTAL	84	100	225	101[c]	309	100

[a] Total *CBS* and *Washington Post* sample included 332 stories; however, only 308 pertained to the Clinton campaign.

[b] *Washington Post*

[c] Because of rounding, the total percentage is greater than 100.

X^2 (2, N = 309) = 2.15, NS

Table 3

Tone of Dole Campaign Coverage[a]

TONE	CBS n = 78		WP[b] n = 209		TOTAL n = 287	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Positive	7	9	10	5	17	6
Negative	18	23	60	29	78	27
Objective	53	68	139	67	192	67
TOTAL	78	100	209	101[c]	287	100

[a] Total *CBS* and *Washington Post* sample included 332 stories; however, only 308 pertained to the Dole campaign.

[b] *Washington Post*

[c] Because of rounding, the total percentage is greater than 100.

X^2 (2, N = 287) = 2.35, NS

Table 4

Frequency and Type of Motive Statements

TYPE	CBS n = 167		WP[a] n = 645		TOTAL n = 812[b]	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Self-serving	144	86	598	93	742	91
Not self-serving	12	7	33	5	45	6
Mixed motives	11	7	14	2	25	3
TOTAL	167	100	645	100	812	100

[a] *Washington Post*

[b] Total number of motive statements contained in the 332 sample stories.

X^2 (2, N = 812) = 10.05, $p < .01$

Table 5

Target of Motive Statements

TARGET	CBS n = 167		WP[a] n = 645		TOTAL n = 812[b]	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Clinton campaign	96	57	332	51	428	53
Dole campaign	60	36	285	44	345	42
Both campaigns	11	7	28	4	39	5
TOTAL	167	100	645	99	812	100

[a] *Washington Post*

[b] Total number of motive statements contained in the 332 sample stories.

X^2 (2, N = 812) = 4.44, $p < .05$

Table 6

Source of Motive Statements

SOURCE	CBS N = 167		WP[a] n = 645		TOTAL n = 812[b]	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Reporter	140	84	537	83	677	83
Candidate	22	13	78	12	100	12
Politician	2	1	7	1	9	1
Expert	2	1	8	1	10	1
Other	1	.5	15	2	16	2
TOTAL	167	99[c]	645	99	812	99

[a] *Washington Post*

[b] Total number of motive statements contained in the 332 sample stories.

[c] Because of rounding, the total percentage is less than 100.

X^2 (4, N = 812) = 2.20, NS

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JMC Faculty Divided: Majority Finds Dozen Uses For Research

By Fred Fedler, Maria Cristina Santana,

Tim Counts, and Arlen Carey

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A paper presented to the Mass Communication & Society Division at the national convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in Chicago in summer of 1997.

JMC Faculty Divided: Majority Finds Dozen Uses For Research

By Fred Fedler, Maria Cristina Santana,
Tim Counts, and Arlen Carey

Do colleges and universities place too much emphasis on research?

A growing number of Americans complains that faculty members devote too much time to research -- and that most of their research is worthless. Parents and legislators want faculty members to spend less time conducting research and more teaching and advising students.

It has been difficult for faculty members to respond to the public's criticisms. Too much of the debate, on both sides, has been based on generalities, speculation, and anecdotal evidence.

To learn more about the value of faculty research, the authors studied the work in a single field: journalism and mass communication (JMC). The authors asked the people most familiar with that research -- faculty members in the field -- to evaluate its usefulness for eight purposes.

Since the 1980s, dozens of books and articles have attacked academia, charging, for example, "that faculty members at research universities are cheating their customers and doing a poor job of teaching undergraduates."[1] Charles J. Sykes, one of academia's most outspoken critics, insists that professors "would rather have root-canal work than spend time with any undergraduates." In a book titled *Profscam*, Sykes continues:

> The result is a modern university distinguished by costs that are zooming out of control; curriculums that look like they were designed by a game show host; nonexistent advising programs; lectures of droning, mind-numbing dullness often to 1,000 or more semi-anonymous undergraduates herded into dilapidated, ill-lighted lecture halls; teaching assistants who can't speak understandable English; and the product of this all, a generation of expensively credentialed college graduates who might not be able to locate England on a map.[2]

Sykes blames faculty members for the problems: for almost single-handedly destroying universities as centers of higher learning. Sykes believes that research is a major factor. Faculty members, he charges:

> ...insist that their obligations to research justify their flight from the college classroom despite the fact that fewer than 1 in 10 ever makes any significant contribution to their field. Too many -- maybe even a vast majority -- spend their time belaboring tiny slivers of knowledge, utterly without redeeming social value except as items on their resumes.[3]

Another critic, Martin Anderson, complains that teaching is an old and honorable profession, yet many of today's professors view it with contempt. "Indeed," Anderson declares, "they believe teaching to be beneath them. They regard their students as mere obstacles to their own intellectual hobbies and scholarly pursuits."

Anderson, author of *Impostors in the Temple*, admits that, "Professors are one of the hardest working, most driven groups in our society." But in an article written for *The Washington Post*, Anderson adds:

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> In the quiet offices of the elite universities they are, when not consulting and making money on the side, intently absorbed in the game of academic research, running faster and faster on the accelerating treadmill of publication. That's because academia's rewards and riches -- salary increases, promotions, prestige -- come not from brilliant, compassionate teaching but from the number of articles researched, written, published -- and then largely forgotten.[4]

A third critic, Gene I. Maeroff of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, complains that the average faculty member spends only 9.8 to 10.5 hours a week in class, "an amount of time slightly greater than the workday of most Americans." The average, Maeroff adds, is *inflated* by community college teachers, who spend 12 to 15 hours a week in classes.[5]

Maeroff challenges the contention that research makes anyone a better teacher. Moreover, he wonders why time for research is included in everyone's schedule, since every faculty member does not conduct research, nor even want to.

Students and their parents also complain about the high cost of tuition. By 1996, the average cost of one year at a private university was $17,631 and rising at more than twice the rate of inflation. The average cost of one year at a public institution was $6,823.[6] Congressional investigators blame faculty members, charging that college costs are rising primarily because faculty members are being paid more for teaching less.[7]

Students also complain that they are unable to enroll in some classes, and that they see fewer and fewer faculty members. Critics again blame faculty members, charging that many have turned their classroom responsibilities over to teaching assistants who are unqualified: "who have little or no experience in the classroom and only a weak grasp of their subject matter."[8]

The criticisms seem dangerous. Land warns that criticisms alone are being used against faculty members. Whether warranted or not, Land says, the criticisms receive attention. Critics highlight extreme cases and target professors "as one of the main problems in higher education."[9]

Mooney warns that professors at research universities, especially, "are fighting for their reputations and their autonomy." With many states running out of money, Mooney says, research universities are not a top priority -- and under intense scrutiny.[10]

Riley, too, warns of the consequences of "faculty bashing." Riley believes that academia's critics have "seized upon the very worst available examples and written them up in such a way that the uninformed will assume that all universities and all professors are equally reprehensible." If the more farfetched criticisms are left unanswered, Riley fears, they may be repeated often enough that many Americans will believe them:

> This eventually would, among other things, damage our general reputation, cause our students' parents to think we are cheating their children, and make it all the easier for legislators to treat us poorly at budget time.[11]

Despite the issue's importance, few researchers have studied the *value* of JMC research. Rather, studies have focused on a multitude of related issues:

*In 1985, Fedler and Smith surveyed members of the American Society of Journalism School Administrators and found that they consider three types of research most valuable: (1) writing a scholarly book, (2) writing a refereed article for a national journal, and (3) writing a college textbook.[12]

*In 1988, Schweitzer identified JMC's 30 most productive schools and 50 most productive faculty members.[13]

*In 1991, Vincent identified the 64 most productive programs and 36 most productive faculty members in telecommunications. Vincent also found that assistant professors do most of the publishing.[14]

*Other studies have found that standards vary from one institution to another, with the greatest emphasis on research at schools with doctoral programs.[15]

A few studies conducted by JMC researchers have refuted common criticisms of higher education.[16] Those studies suggest, for example, that critics exaggerate faculty members' emphasis on research. In 1982, Fedler and Counts found that most JMC faculty members devoted no more than 10% of their time to research. Fedler and Counts' typical respondent published 3.4 articles during the last five years -- but none in a national refereed journal. Moreover, only 8.6% listed research as their primary goal.[17]

Schweitzer found that even JMC's top researchers averaged less than one article a year. Similarly, Weaver and Wilhoit found that about a quarter of JMC's faculty members never published an article of any type. The average JMC educator "published four articles and one book during a career of about 12 years...."[18]

Critics, however, continue to attack faculty research, especially its value. They ask whether JMC research: (1) helps the field's practitioners, (2) makes faculty members better teachers, or (3) is used -- or even read -- by anyone.

Research, however, may have many uses, including some previously unexplored. This article examines its value for eight purposes, from use in classrooms to use in textbooks and consulting.

Methodology

To learn more about the value of JMC research, the authors surveyed the people most familiar with it: members of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). Each member of AEJMC receives a minimum of three publications, all refereed: *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, and *Journalism & Mass Communication Monographs*. In addition, many also receive the refereed publications of AEJMC divisions: publications such as *Mass Comm Review* and the *Newspaper Research Journal*.

To obtain a random sample of approximately 600 members of AEJMC, the authors used the organization's 1995-1996 directory and started with the third entry (a number selected at random) in its alphabetical listing of members. The authors then addressed a questionnaire to the person described in every fifth entry, excluding anyone who taught at a community college or outside the United States. If the fifth entry listed someone ineligible for the study, the authors proceeded to the next entry, then to the fifth after that.

The authors asked 23 questions. Six asked for demographic information: the respondents' gender, rank, highest earned degree, areas of specialization, years of full-time teaching experience, and years of full-time media experience. In addition, the respondents were asked what percentage of their workday they devoted to: (A) teaching, (B) research, (C) service, and (D) administration.

Three additional questions asked whether the respondents' worked at a public or private institution, the highest degree offered by their department or unit, and the total number of students enrolled in their institution.

Questions 11 and 12 asked how many refereed convention papers the respondents had presented and how many articles they had published in refereed journals during the past five years. Question 13 asked for the total number of textbooks they had written or contributed to.

The following questions then asked the respondents about their use of JMC research -- how often during a typical term they:

1. Read JMC's current research for enjoyment.
2. Read JMC's current research to learn more about the field.
3. Used JMC's current research to prepare for their classes.
4. Shared convention papers and research articles with undergraduates in their classes.
5. Shared convention papers and research articles with graduate students in their classes.
6. Consulted other faculty members' research while conducting research of their own.
7. Consulted other faculty members' research while writing or contributing to textbooks.
8. Applied current research to their professional work in the field

Another question asked respondents why they conducted research: whether, for example, they did it for enjoyment, because it made them better teachers, or because it helped them obtain tenure and promotions. A final, open-ended, question asked what other uses the respondents made of JMC research.

There were 598 respondents and, about two weeks after being mailed the questionnaire, all 598 were mailed a postcard which encouraged them to respond (and thanked them if they had already done so).

Findings

Fifteen questionnaires were returned as undeliverable, and 11 others returned by their recipients. Six of those recipients explained that they had retired, and five explained that they were not faculty members.* Thus, 572 questionnaires were apparently delivered to qualified recipients, and

---

*The alphabetical listing in AEJMC's membership directory led to some errors, since some entries contained only a name and address -- and no affiliation. As a result, the questionnaire was mailed to some graduate students and to a few individuals who had retired or who had never worked in academia.

279 were completed and returned to the authors, for an overall response rate of 46.7% (and a response rate of 48.8% for the 572 questionnaires apparently delivered to qualified recipients).

A total of 183 respondents (65.6%) were men and 94 (33.7%) were women.+ More than two-thirds (69.9%) had earned a doctorate. About 2% said their highest degree was a bachelor's, and 25.1% a master's. By rank, 9.3% of the respondents were instructors, 28.7% assistant professors, 24.7% associate professors, and 28.7% full professors. Eight percent marked an "other" category.

The respondents had taught full-time a median of 10.0 years and mean of 11.9. They had worked full-time in their field for about the same lengths of time: a median of 10.0 years and mean of 12.1.

Only 12 (4.3%) of the respondents said they had no professional experience, and 25.9% said they had from 1 to 5 years of experience. Conversely, 48.7% had more than 10 years of full-time professional experience.

Seventy-nine percent of this study's respondents taught at public institutions. Also, 23.7% said the highest degree offered by their department was a bachelor's, 45.2% a master's, and 29.7% a doctorate.

When asked to list their primary areas of specialization -- and told to mark as many areas as appropriate -- the respondents gave some indication of today's priorities in JMC education. Their responses suggest that JMC's traditional emphasis on reporting and editing continues:

+These and other percentages do not always add up to 100 because some respondents did not answer every question, Others gave two answers to some questions. Also, the questionnaire provided an "Other" category for some questions.

Table I

The Respondents' Teaching Specialties

103 (36.9%)	Reporting/editing
100 (35.8%)	Mass comm & society
80 (28.7%)	Theory/methodology
63 (22.6%)	Advertising/pr
49 (17.6%)	History
47 (16.8%)	Radio/television
43 (15.4%)	Law
38 (13.6%)	Ethics
37 (13.3%)	International
36 (12.9%)	Other[19]
21 (7.5%)	Photojournalism/visual comm

Time And Productivity

How do faculty members spend their time? The respondents reported spending a median of 50 to 59% of their time teaching, 20 to 29% conducting research, and 10 to 19% in service. Sixty-four percent devoted 50% or more than of their time to teaching. By comparison, only 9.4% devoted 50% or more of their time to research. The following table summarizes the results:

Table II

The Respondents' Allocation Of Time

TIME	TEACHING	RESEARCH	SERVICE	ADMINISTRATION	OTHER
00-09%	5.0%	18.6%	38.0%	56.3%	86.0%
10-19%	3.9	20.4	34.4	17.9	6.1
20-29%	5.7	27.2	20.8	11.1	2.9
30-39%	9.3	15.8	3.9	3.2	0.4
40-49%	11.8	8.2	1.4	1.4	1.8
50-59%	21.1	6.8	0.7	3.6	1.4
60-69%	19.7	1.1	0.0	2.2	0.0
70-79%	8.6	0.4	0.0	2.2	0.4
80-89%	9.7	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.0
90-99%	4.7	0.7	0.0	1.1	0.4

The respondents were also asked about their productivity as researchers. During the past five years, 72 (25.8%) had not presented a refereed convention paper. The median number of refereed papers presented was 3.0. Thirty-one percent of the respondents had presented more than five refereed convention papers, and 11.5% had presented more than 10.

Thirty-two percent of the respondents had not published an article in a refereed journal during the past five years. The median was 2.0. Thirty-nine (14.0%) of the respondents had published more than five, and 12 (4%) more than 10.

During their careers in academia, almost half (49.1%) had written or contributed to a textbook. Thirteen (4.6%) had written or contributed to more than 5, and 4 (1.4%) to more than 10.

The Respondents' Use Of Research.

The respondents were then asked this study's key questions: about their use of JMC research. All but 4 of the 279 respondents reported using JMC research. Two (0.7%) responded "never" to all eight questions about their use of research, and one explained, "It's a useless game, absurd activity for a second-rate 'field' masquerading as a discipline, especially at research universities."

Two other respondents marked "Never" to some of the eight questions about research and "Not Applicable" to others.

The respondents were most likely (7 or more times a term) to use JMC research to learn more about the field and to prepare for their classes. They were least likely (0 to 3 times a term) to share JMC research with the undergraduates in their classes and to use JMC research while conducting research of their own. The complete results include:

Table III

The Respondents' Uses Of Research During A Typical Term

	NEVER	1-3 TIMES	4-6 TIMES	7-9 TIMES	10/more TIMES	Not APPLICABLE
Read for enjoyment	11.5%	27.2%	21.9%	6.1%	29.7%	1.8%
Read to learn about field	1.4	14.7	25.4	10.8	45.5	0.7
Use To prepare for classes	3.9	24.4	24.0	12.5	33.0	1.4
Share with Undergrads	16.8	43.0	18.6	5.7	9.3	5.0
Share with grad. students	10.0	15.1	14.0	7.2	16.8	35.5
Consult for own research	10.4	36.6	14.0	4.3	24.4	8.6

The respondents were also asked two other questions about their use of research. First, how often they consulted JMC research while writing or contributing to textbooks. Second, how often those who continued to work for the media applied JMC research to their jobs in the profession.

Forty percent of the respondents said the first question did not apply to them: that they had not written a textbook. Of the 164 who answered the question, 26.2% said they never consulted other faculty members' research, 33.5% said they consulted it 1 to 3 times a term, 9.8% used it 4 to 6 times, 3.0% used it 7 to 9 times, and 27.4% used it 10 or more times.

Fifty percent of the respondents said the second question did not apply to them, and an additional 17 did not respond to the question. Of those who indicated that they continued to work in the profession, 21.0% said they never used their colleagues' research, 37.9% said they used it 1 to 3 times a term, 20.2% used it 4 to 6 times, 1.6% used it 7 to 9 times, and 19.0% used it 10 or more times. In other words, 73.4% of the faculty members who write JMC's textbooks use their colleagues' research. Similarly, 78.7% of those who continue to work in the field also use their colleagues' research.

Reasons For Conducting Research

Only 15 (5.4%) of the 279 respondents said they conducted no research. Why do most faculty members conduct research? The respondents were most likely to explain that research makes them better teachers, and also that they enjoy it. In fact, more than half agreed that JMC research was useful for every reason listed on the questionnaire, including helping professionals in the field:

Table IV

The Respondents' Primary Reasons For Conducting Research

196 (70.3%)	It makes me a better teacher
185 (66.3%)	I enjoy it
182 (65.2%)	It helps me obtain tenure, promotions, and other perks of academia
178 (63.8%)	It is of value to students and other faculty members
148 (53.0%)	It is a job requirement
147 (52.7%)	It is of value to professionals working in my field

A surprising number of respondents -- 131 (47.0%) -- said they do *not* engage in research primarily because it is a job requirement. That answer suggests that many JMC programs either do not require their faculty members to conduct research, or allow them to engage in other activities in lieu of research. That answer also suggests that many faculty members conduct research because they enjoy it and find it useful, not because they are required to.

Still, 65.2% of the respondents said one of the major reasons they conducted research was to advance in academia. Similarly, 53.0% said they conducted research, at least in part, because it was a job requirement.

Differences By Gender & Rank

There were few significant differences by gender: not in men's and women's allocation of time, reasons for conducting research, uses of research, nor productivity:

*5.5% of the men and 5.3% of the women said they conducted no research.

*25.1% of the men and 26.6% of the women had not presented a refereed convention paper during the past five years.

*31.7% of the men and 33.0% of the women had not published a article in a refereed journal during the past five years.

Men did have significantly more years of full-time teaching experience ($X^2 = 14.38$, $p < .002$). Forty-one percent of the men had taught more than 15 years, compared to 19.5% of the women. However, men did not have more professional experience.

Although previous studies found junior faculty members the most productive, this study found no significant differences by rank: not in the respondents' presentation of refereed convention papers, nor in their publication of refereed journal articles:

Table V

The Respondents' Productivity In Convention Papers, By Rank

	ASSISTANT	ASSOCIATE	FULL
No papers	22.5%	20.3%	28.8%
1-3 papers	21.3	26.1	28.8
4-6 papers	20.0	26.1	17.5
7-10 papers	22.5	14.5	12.5
11 plus	13.8	13.0	12.5

Table VI

The Respondents' Productivity, In Refereed Articles, By Rank

	ASSISTANT	ASSOCIATE	FULL
No papers	23.8%	27.5%	25.0%
1-3 papers	51.3	34.8	37.5
4-6 papers	18.8	18.8	20.0
7-10 papers	6.3	11.6	8.8
11 plus	0.0	7.2	8.8

Senior faculty members were, however, significantly more likely to have written or contributed to textbooks. Seventy-one percent of the full professors had written or contributed to a textbook, compared to 52.1% of the associate professor and to 31.3% of the assistant professors. Moreover, 37.5% of the full professors had written or contributed to three or more textbooks, compared to 14.5% of the associate professors and 5.0% of the assistant professors ($X^2 = 46.96$, $p < .000$).

Senior faculty members were also more likely to share convention papers and journal articles with the graduate students in their classes. Twenty-seven percent of the full professors did so 10 or more times a term, compared to 19.1% of the associate professors and 11.5% of the assistant professors. Only 3.8% of the full professors said they never did so ($X^2 = 34.56$, $p < .003$).

Differences By Degree & Institution

There were also significant differences by degree. Seventy-two percent of the respondents with a doctorate said they enjoyed research, compared to 54.3% of the respondents with a master's degree and 20.0% of the respondents with a bachelor's degree ($X^2 = 11.95$, $p < .003$)

Respondents with a doctorate were also more likely to believe that research made them better teachers. Seventy-five percent of the respondents with a doctorate expressed that belief, compared to 58.6% of the respondents with an master's degree and to 20.0% of the respondents with a bachelor's degree ($X^2 = 12.41$, $p < .002$).

Other significant differences emerged by institution. First, private institutions were smaller. Eighty-one percent of the respondents at private institutions reported enrollments of 15,000 or fewer students, compared to 36.6% of the respondents at public institutions ($X^2 = 40.7$, $p < .000$). Second, faculty members in departments that offered a graduate degree devoted more of their time to research ($X^2 = 51.2$, p. $< .05$).

Faculty members in departments that offered a doctorate were also significantly more likely to:

*Share convention papers with the graduate students in their classes ($X^2 = 87.68$, $p < .000$).

*Consult JMC research while conducting research of their own ($X^2 = 33.56$, $p < .0002$).

*Apply JMC research to professional work they do for the media ($X^2 = 18.05$, $p < .05$.).

Two other differences approached significance. First, faculty members in departments that offered a graduate degree tended to present more refereed papers ($X^2 = 14.68$, $p < .07$). Second, faculty members in departments that offered a doctorate seemed more likely to share convention papers with undergraduates in their classes, ($X^2 = 16.53$, $p < .08$).

Other Uses Of Research

A final, open-ended question asked respondents what other uses they made of JMC's research. Eighty-eight respondents made some additional comments, about a dozen with great hostility. Their responses included:

> --Unfortunately, much of the research in my field [law and reporting/editing] is of little practical value.
>
> --I primarily conduct research that will benefit the industry, not to impress other academics. The reason journalism research is criticized is because most of it is not relevant to the profession.
>
> --A good deal of research in the field I ignore completely! There's a lot of useless research out there that is presented at conferences and printed in journals. I think academics need to consider the value of what they're doing, not just "will it get published?"
>
> --Most of the research I see is pure trash. Too much useless material in irrelevant journals. When we learn to be selective in what we publish we will advance the field as it deserves to be advanced.
>
> --Most all research in journalism has little or no practical value and so is of no help when teaching students journalism. In all my 20 years in the business I never referred to journalism research, and no one I know then or now does.

However, a majority of the respondents said they found JMC's research valuable. Moreover, they cited more than a dozen uses for it (See Appendix A). The respondents' No. 1 reason was that research advances the state of knowledge, thus contributing to their intellectual growth, satisfying their curiosity, and enhancing everyone's understanding of the field. Other respondents said, for example, that JMC research:

--Helps society and its decision-makers.

--Is useful in their work as consultants.

--Is personally and intellectually fulfilling.

--Makes them better teachers and gives them something to share with their students.

--Provides interesting, important, and practical information that they share with both public and professional groups.

Finally, about a dozen respondents pointed out flaws they perceived in this study's methodology and/or questionnaire. Several respondents complained that advertising and public relations are distinct fields and should be listed separately. Other respondents complained that the questionnaire asked about the number of textbooks they had written, but not about the number of popular books.

One respondent said the questionnaire should have defined "research" and explained more clearly whether it included articles that were not refereed. A second respondent said the authors' definitions of the "field" and "research" seemed to be based on assumptions from their own career paths, and that the emphasis on full-time positions ignored the experiences of some women in academia.

Discussion and Conclusions

Faculty members responding to this survey confirmed some previous findings, but not others. More specifically, this study:

*Failed to confirm previous findings that assistant professors are academia's most productive researchers.

*Confirmed at least three previous studies that found the typical journalism educator has many years of practical experience.[20] This study's respondents had a median of 10.0 years of full-time professional experience. Only 4.3% of the respondents had never worked as professionals in their field.

*Confirmed differences by both degree and institution. Respondents with a doctorate were more likely to enjoy research and to believe that it made them better teachers. Respondents in departments that offered a doctorate also tended to be more productive researchers.

*Confirmed the typical levels of productivity reported by previous studies. A quarter to a third of JMC's faculty members had not presented a refereed paper or published an article in a refereed journal during the past five years. Only 14% averaged more than one article a year. That was true of faculty members of both genders and at all ranks.

Finally, this study suggests three other trends:

FIRST -- Colleges' and universities' emphasis on research seems exaggerated. Expectations vary from institution to institution, and may also vary from field to field. Nearly half the respondents (47%) reported that they do *not* conduct research primarily because it is a job requirement. Many are apparently allowed to engage in other types of activities in lieu of research. That option may explain, in part, the limited number of refereed papers and journal articles presented by the average faculty member.

SECOND -- Faculty opposition to research seems exaggerated. Two-thirds of the respondents said they enjoy research. Moreover, a majority believes that research: (1) makes them better teachers, (2) is of value to students and other faculty members, and (3) is also of value to professionals. Still, a sizeable minority (33.7% of the respondents) dislikes research. Their dilemma may explain much of the dissention within academia. To avoid the problem, newcomers who dislike research might seek positions at smaller schools without graduate programs (the schools least likely to emphasize research). Conversely, research institutions that employ faculty members with a bachelor's or master's degree should understand that many will dislike research -- and produce little that is refereed.

THIRD -- JMC research is valuable. Of the 279 respondents, all but 4 said they regularly used the field's research. The respondents reported reading research for enjoyment, using it to learn more about their field, using it while preparing for classes, sharing it with students, consulting it while conducting research, and also consulting it while working in the field.

Although they may not use it themselves, even academia's most vehement critics can no longer claim that faculty research is of little or no value. More than 98% of this study's respondents reported using it regularly, and for a variety of purposes.[21]

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APPENDIX A: OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

Other Uses Of Research

A final, open-ended question asked each respondent, "What other uses do you make of the research in your field?" About a dozen respondents vehemently denounced JMC research. Others, however, cited more than a dozen uses for JMC research. All their responses include:

1. Just let some of us teach!
2. Every opportunity that I get to share it with others outside of academia, I take. I give presentations to local groups like women's clubs, local service clubs, and statewide organizations. I have on occasion talked with university alumni in general, high school students, and even prospective students.
3. It is useful to apply research tools in public service projects and consulting assignments.
4. I often serve as a source for journalists writing about media economics. This is because of my research.
5. I do grant-funded research that benefits the school, department, and me. It's a form of research and provides travel money.
6. I often wonder how any of what we do is relevant to the industry, average person, even government.
7. Some PR research is of use in my consulting activities ... although frankly very little. Most of it is poorly done, of little practical utility, or (apparently) written to promote some personal mission or activist cause....
8. To contribute to the body of knowledge; to grow intellectually.
9. There is a huge public interest in this subject, and I am often called by reporters, lawyers, and other professionals for informed advice and opinion.
10. I am teaching journalism classes part time while I work on my doctorate. During my course work ... I read research for my papers and found that it was extremely applicable to courses I was teaching -- nothing learned is ever wasted, and it does filter down.
11. Our institution is (until now) considered a "teaching" institution. Emphases have not been placed on research, though research by colleagues has been an ongoing practice. Research with too esoteric an application has limited value....I believe in knowledge as having value when it can be readily applied by student and professional alike. Research for the sake of research seems self defeating.
12. If we want to convince legislators that research is really important, editors need to be more selective in their choices for publication.
13. To promote and protect the First Amendment and FOI issues.
14. Primarily, I use it to help my teaching. Unfortunately, much of the research in my field [law and reporting/editing] is of little practical value.
15. As conversation with colleagues, graduate students. As a basis for suggesting improvements in media.
16. Recommend it to professional groups when appropriate -- or cite it. I serve on several community boards, and they appreciate hearing about relevant work (I never say research!).

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17. Writing columns for a local newspaper, making public appearances and speeches.
18. Literature reviews.
19. Overall, I use non-academic sources and articles (*The American Editor*, *E&P*, *Quill*, *CJR*, *AJR*) much more often than I use academic research, especially in class preparation.
20. I use it for teaching knowledge to give better lectures.
21. (1) Share with faculty and students. (2) Put them in library for future reference. (3) Use for writing proposals for external funding.
22. It is an important issue -- I want to know more. It is of value to our society.
23. Mainly to see what's the latest in my research area, to conduct my own research, and share the results with my students and colleagues.
24. I have students reading current research so they can learn how to write a good (or not so good -- it depends) paper. Thus they learn to be critical of the research published by other scholars.
25. I am a regular contributor to *American Journalism Review* which suits me much better than being published in *Journalism Quarterly*, which I seldom read. I also have continued to do reporting.
26. Most of my research is in history -- of magazines, of design. This informs my teaching. Knowing why a magazine succeeded or failed provides practical object lessons. I also write for magazines, which provides more practical object lessons for students! My J-school is teaching-oriented, geared to training professional journalists. Generally we have no use for theoretical research.
27. Professional research in advertising is more meaningful than scholarly research. Too many professors know nothing about advertising.
28. I either undertake projects that assist some industry or organization or work to disseminate relevant findings to appropriate organizations/businesses....
29. I'm still critical of the research in the field that fails to live up to the "so what" test.
30. Intellectual curiosity.
31. I advise media organizations about developments in technology and technology policy.
32. In writings/presentations to media and nonmedia groups.
33. It can be used as a literature review for articles or papers.
34. Apply it in professional media work. Further my knowledge in my areas of academic interest in order to produce more informed work.
35. Legislators don't seem to understand that research and production are closely linked, positively correlated. Non-research institutions may produce good citizens and good people ready to take jobs, but they don't make the breakthroughs that change the world in so many ways.
36. I write about research for trade magazines to let professionals know what is going on.
37. Planning to work with journalists on implementing some of the theoretical ideas.
38. To affect educational policy/curriculum decisions, re. study of media issues.
39. I am very selective in reading research because the formula of research presentation is utterly boring. Most of the research presented at conventions is very insignificant. Critical analysis is more interesting and useful than the so-called empirical research that gets bogged down in statistics.
40. Share with other professionals.

41. I primarily conduct research that will benefit the industry, not to impress other academics. The reason journalism research is criticized is because most of it is not relevant to the profession.

42. To guide my own research.

43. Used in decision-making for school boards, administrators, and language arts coordinators in high schools. Has been used by state departments of education dealing with secondary school curricula.

44. I use it for the classes I am taking. Most of it has little direct effect on teaching beginning newswriting.

45. Preparing to talk with professionals. Arguing for resources for unit from college and university administration and from private sources.

46. I don't need to do research for money or promotion. It's important to ... create new knowledge and to introduce students to things they might not now know. If universities are not to create new knowledge then what is our purpose?

47. For comparative analysis of global media and developments.

48. Contribute to public policy discourse.

49. To help decide equipment purchases. To look at social implications of the media. To help students understand what is expected of them in the job market and what kind of openings and salaries they can expect.

50. Use it to better understand the world.

51. Consulting.

52. Research is a source of ideas. Many research findings are simply wrong answers to good questions ... Most research is unrelated to most teaching. Lots of good teaching and lots of good research are not compatible. Most research does not support teaching. The best teachers are not the best researchers....

53. In graduate-level courses, I have students begin the semester reading great research summaries to learn theoretical and methodological origins, then we move to recent journal articles. I spend much of summer reviewing journals and selecting these articles for class....

54. In general, the research of our field is of limited value to both educators and practitioners, not because it is poorly designed or because the researchers are inferior, but because topics selected for research by most JMC researchers are not central to our core concerns. We have sought respect by imitation, not by originality. We need to use our insights -- and our tools -- to do serious scholarship about journalism's and mass media's central issues: writing, editing, reporting, economics, community leadership, connections.

55. Consulting. Extend work beyond boundaries of my desk.

56. I do a lot to keep me up on contemporary items my colleagues are interested in and some to help my teaching....Very important to share with students and answer questions/inconsistencies that arise.

57. I use research for a column I write and for the textbook I write.

58. I do considerable professional consulting -- most of which is connected to research -- my 1995 consulting income re: public relations research was more than $100,000.

59. I serve as an expert witness in libel cases. I speak with reporters for stories about media ethics.

60. A good deal of research in the field I ignore completely! There's a lot of useless research out there....Academics need to consider the value of what they're doing, not just "will it get published?"

61. Share with professionals. Obtain grants.

62. Helps me prepare workshops and seminars for professionals in several different fields.

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63. Most of the research I see is pure trash. Too much useless material in irrelevant journals. When we learn to be selective in what we publish we will advance the field as it deserves to be advanced.
64. To compare perspectives with other fields of interest to me ... namely anthropology and theology.
65. Inform students/demonstrate to students research methods/processes.
66. Add to knowledge. Answer students' questions. Answer my own questions. It's fun and keeps one fresh, up-to-date, on the edge about what is happening in the knowledge business.
67. It provides a way of checking if we are doing our jobs correctly. Without it we would experience no growth.
68. I look for congruities among fields and fresh applications for interdisciplinary work....
69. I am the director of research for my unit, so I use my training and experience constantly. I do not teach at all; however, I influence others who do....
70. Research helps me understand the world around me and thus to adapt my whole life to ongoing changes in society. This is the case particularly as modern society is dominated by information.
71. It keeps me thinking. Research creates problems to solve -- it forces me to continue to think.
72. Useful in obtaining consulting jobs.
73. My research relates to the community.
74. I've always wanted to write books and conduct research. It is part of my basic self-identity.
75. Most of my research is targeted to applied mass communication.
76. I try to live the ideal of the teacher/scholar. Each informs the other. I do not see how we can be one without the other....
77. I use industry research....in my classes to demonstrate key points.
78. It's a useless game, absurd activity for a second-rate "field" masquerading as a discipline, especially at research universities.
79. Most all research in journalism has little or no practical value and so is of no help when teaching students journalism. In all my 20 years in the business I never referred to journalism research, and no one I know then or now does.
80. (1) Synthesize, in my mind (and for the benefit of my students) the state of knowledge re a particular topic/issue in the field. (2) Use research findings in day-to-day life and....(3) Try to understand the research process better; learn more about how to and how NOT to conduct research (methodological aspects).
81. Primarily used for writing textbooks.
82. It is important. Keeps the field vital. Keeps us vital and informed and non-stagnant. Job would be less interesting without research.
83. My research area is health communication ... I enjoy this field and trust it will be of practical, applicable benefit.
84. I'm amazed how often my research studies just pop out of my mouth during a lecture (even in courses such as intro to media writing). Also I am quite convinced that my studies in history have helped me help students. They don't realize that journalism hasn't "always" been this way and won't always be this way. Historical comparisons let them see that other ways may be appropriate, best, etc.
85. Keeping my brain working.
86. Speak about it to groups both in and out of media.
87. Publishing articles in the trade press.
88. Consulting. Providing mentoring based on my research and mentoring.

Endnotes

1. M.J. Land. "Critics Use of the Media and Public Opinion of Faculty Members at Universities." Paper presented to the Mass Communication and Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication at the association's national convention in Washington, D.C., August 1995, p. 3.

2. Charles J. Sykes. "ProfScam: Professors And The Demise Of Higher Education. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1988, p. 4.

3. Sykes. ProfScam, pp. 5-6.

4. Martin Anderson. "The Galls of Ivy: Our Professors Do Everything but Teach." The Washington Post, Oct. 18, 1992, p. C3.

5. Gene I. Maeroff. "College Teachers, the New Leisure Class." The Wall Street Journal, Sept. 13, 1993, p. A16.

6. "Those Scary College Costs." Newsweek, April 29, 1996, p. 53. SEE ALSO: "With Colleges for All: More than the cost of Harvard, it is the rising tuition at state schools that subverts the democratic ideal" by Nicholas Lemann. Time, June 10, 1996, pp. 67-68. SEE ALSO: "The Widening Gap In Higher Education: A Special Report." The Chronicle of Higher Education, June 14, 1996, p. A10.

7. Bob Dart. "Are colleges cheating students?" The Atlanta Constitution, Sept. 15, 1992, p. E1.

8. Martin Anderson. "What Me Teach? I'm a Professor." The Wall Street Journal, Sept. 8, 1992, p. A16.

9. Land. "Critics Use of the Media and Public Opinion of Faculty Members at Universities," pp. 18-20.

10. Carolyn J. Mooney. "Critics Within and Without Academe Assail Professors at Research Universities." The Chronicle of Higher Education, Oct. 28, 1992, p. A.17. SEE ALSO: "'Accountability' of Colleges Gets Renewed Scrutiny From State Officials" by Kit Lively. The Chronicle of Higher Education, Sept. 2, 1992, p. A25.

11. Sam G. Riley. "COMMENTARY. Faculty Bashing: Some Implications for Mass Communication Professors." Journalism Educator, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn 1993), p. 66.

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13. John C. Schweitzer. "Research Article Productivity By Mass Communication Scholars." Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Summer 1988), p. 479.

14. Richard C. Vincent. "Telecommunications Research Productivity of U.S. Communication Programs: 1984-1989." Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Winter 1991), p. 840.

15. Schweitzer. "Faculty research expectation varies among universities." Journalism Educator, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 1989), p. 48. SEE ALSO: "The Research Climate in Programs in Journalism and Mass Communication" by John Schweitzer. Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 4, (Winter 1989), p. 989.

16. Fred Fedler. "Growing body of evidence refutes some criticisms of journalism schools." Ecquid Novi, Vol. 16, Nos. 1 & 2 (1995), p. 53.

17. Fred Fedler and Tim Counts. "National J-faculty survey reveals job likes, dislikes." Journalism Educator, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Autumn 1982), p. 3.

18. David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit. "A profile of JMC educators: traits, attitudes and values." Journalism Educator, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Summer 1988), p. 28.

19. In addition to 10 categories listed by the authors, the respondents used an "Other" category to list two dozen other teaching specialties. The most common, written in by 11 respondents, was "technology/new media." Other categories, each written in by from one to three respondents, included, for example: cultural studies, literary journalism, magazines, media management, media and politics, minorities and/or women, publication design, scholastic journalism, science and/or health communication, and telecom.

20. In 1982, Stone found that the average faculty member had 7.4 years of media experience. Fedler and Counts surveyed 600 faculty members and found that they had an average of 12.5 years of experience. Weaver and Wilhoit surveyed 893 full-time faculty members and found that only 13 (1.3%) claimed no media experience. Some had as many as 50 years of experience, and the average was 9.3 SEE: "Professional experience gap between Ph.D.'s, non Ph.D.'s narrows, 'Roundtable' discloses" by Gerald C. Stone. Journalism Educator, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 1982), p. 5. SEE ALSO: "National J-faculty survey reveals job likes, dislikes" by Fedler and Counts, p. 3. SEE ALSO: "A profile of JMC educators: traits, attitudes and values" by Weaver and Wilhoit, p. 16.

21. As the final draft of this study was being written, a new study presented data that support its conclusions. Oskam asked JMC educators how they "keep up-to-date with their specialty area in mass communication." Ninety-eight percent of Oskam's respondents said they read the field's literature, 86% reported that they attended academic conferences (where research is often presented), and 77% said they conducted research. SEE: "How Educators Keep Up-to-Date with the Changes in the Field" by Judy Barnes Oskam. Journalism Educator, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Autumn 1996), pp. 48-49.

Consequences of Negative Political Advertising Exposure

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**Paper presented to the Mass Communication & Society Division at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Chicago, July/August, 1997.

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Consequences of Negative Political Advertising Exposure

Abstract

Three potential effects of exposure to negative political advertising are examined. Findings show that exposure to negative advertising did not lead to better knowledge recall or an increase in issue salience. Exposure to negative advertising did correlate with one political alienation measure. High levels of exposure to negative ads led respondents to agree with the statement "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think." Negative ads thus demonstrated very little effect on respondents.

Consequences of Negative Political Advertising Exposure

Fueling the heated debates over campaign finance reform is the fact that spending on political advertising has reached record amounts in recent years. Devlin (1993) reports that proponents of the three major candidates in the 1992 presidential campaign spent a record $133 million, most of which went toward paid political advertising. Some believe that the final figures for the 1996 presidential campaign could nearly double the 1992 total (American University, 1997).

While spending on political advertising has been increasing, so too has the use of attack ads, advertising that, rather than point out the positive qualities of the sponsor, directly attacks the opponent. Researchers have found that, while attack ads oftentimes are memorable (Johnson & Copeland, 1987; Garramone, 1984; Faber, Tims & Schmitt, 1990), they nonetheless can have unintended backlash effects (Roberts, 1995; Faber, Tims & Schmitt, 1993; Roddy & Garramone, 1988).

One of the main arguments for using negative advertisements is that they provide citizens with important information to differentiate between the candidates. It also allows candidates to highlight certain issues so as to increase awareness and concern with the issues.

But do citizens learn information from exposure to negative advertising? And what other effects might negative advertising have on individuals?

The present study investigates three potential consequences of exposure to negative advertisements.

First, this study examines whether exposure to negative advertising increases individuals' level of knowledge about the candidates. If, as some political strategists argue, negative advertising provides important information directly to citizens, we would expect high levels of exposure to negative advertising to be associated with high political information recall.

Second, this study examines whether exposure to negative advertising increases individuals' issue salience levels. If negative advertising allows candidates to highlight the importance of certain issues, we would expect high levels of exposure to negative advertising to be associated with high concern with the issues mentioned in the ads.

Finally, this study examines whether exposure to negative advertising increases individuals' feelings of political alienation. Perhaps individuals who are exposed often to negative advertising develop feelings of disenchantment with the political system overall.

Data from a telephone survey conducted during the 1996 Senate election in Oregon will be used to examine these consequences.

Negative advertising has become increasingly used by political candidates. An examination of the consequences of exposure to these attack ads is important. If negative advertising does increase knowledge about the candidates or increase awareness of important issues, then the use of attack ads serves a useful purpose. If negative advertising, however, affects how individuals view the political process, making viewers feel alienated toward all public officials, then the use of attack ads serve a detrimental function in our society.

Theoretical background

Negative political commercials have been a part of presidential campaigns since the introduction of political advertising on television during the Eisenhower-Stevenson campaigns of the 1950s (Jamieson, 1984). Negative advertising appeals, however, are similar to positive ads in several ways. Roberts (1991), in fact, states that positive and negative campaign commercials differ only in their intent. Positive commercials try to inflate and negative commercials try to deflate the bond of trust between potential voter and candidate.

Negative advertising can be extremely effective in impacting negatively on the target of the message (see Boydston & Kaid, 1983; Kaid & Boydston, 1987; Merritt, 1984). Negative advertising, however, also can create a backlash of unintended effects by negatively impacting on the source of the message (Hill, 1989; Faber, Tims & Schmitt, 1993). Backlash effects are most likely among voters who are partisans of the target candidate (Faber, Tims & Schmitt, 1993) and when the ad attacks the image, rather than an issue stand, of the target candidate (Roddy & Garramone, 1988).

Thus, previous research suggests that negative advertising may not be as effective as political strategists would argue.

Knowledge acquisition

Whether potential voters learn information from political advertising has been the focus of several studies. Many studies (for example, Atkin & Heald, 1976; Hofstetter & Buss, 1980; Hofstetter, Zukin & Buss, 1978; Mulder, 1979; Patterson & McClure, 1974) generally found a positive relationship between exposure and/or attention to political advertising and knowledge about candidates and issues.

Several factors influence the strength of the relationship between exposure and knowledge, including how knowledge is operationalized. As Faber (1992) points out, surveys utilizing open-ended recall questions are less successful at showing a link between ad exposure and knowledge for lower level races In other words, these studies using open-ended recall questions indicate much poorer memory for information about political ads than studies asking individuals to estimate their own knowledge levels. In fact, Kaid and Sanders (1978), employing open-ended recall questions in a laboratory experiment, found that 17 percent of their subjects were unable to recall anything from political commercials immediately after viewing them.

Previous research, then, would suggest that exposure to political advertising does not necessarily mean the information in the ads is successfully transmitted to the consumer. Whether individuals gain knowledge from information contained in negative advertising is one purpose of the present study.

Agenda-setting

Since the seminal work by McCombs and Shaw (1972) examining the agenda-setting function of the press, hundreds of studies have been conducted in this area. Most studies generally found that the news media, through their coverage of issues, influence the perceived importance of issues held by the public. This agenda-setting effect on the issue saliences of the public has withstood tests of a wide variety of contingent conditions, including individual variables (frequency of interpersonal communication, attitudes toward the media) and message variables (obtrusiveness of the issue, concrete vs. abstract issues; see Rogers, Dearing & Bregman, 1993, for a review).

While the vast majority of research has widely supported the hypothesis that news media coverage influences the public agenda, less evidence has been found for a similar influence on issue saliences for political advertising.

Bowers (1973), for example, found a significant relationship between newspaper ads and the public's issue agenda in the 1970 senate and gubernatorial campaigns. However, he also found a weaker relationship between the agenda of issues mentioned in television ads and the public's agenda (Bowers, 1977). Thus, the type of medium may influence the agenda-setting effects of advertising.

Atkin and Heald (1976) found a moderate relationship between advertising exposure and concern ratings for issues mentioned in the ads. Further, they reported this agenda-setting effect of advertising was strongest among people who had low interest and low exposure to other sources of information.

Again, as with knowledge acquisition, the link between advertising exposure and agenda-setting effects is not uniform across previous research, though negative advertising could potentially have strong agenda-setting effects. Logically, the severity of claims in a typical attack ad should give strong cues to viewers that the issue emphasized in the ad is extremely important.

Political alienation

The public's participation in politics, such as voting in elections, has been considered an essential part of a democracy (DeLuca, 1995). This is why many researchers worry about the increasing number of "Independents" -- who are less likely to vote than partisans -- and low turnout rates among all voters (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Asher, 1992; Grant & Luttbeg, 1991; Keith et. al, 1992; Southwell, 1985).

Obstacles, such as the difficulty of voter registration, have contributed to low participation in the U.S. politics. However, political alienation remains a key factor in non-voting. According to Chen (1992) and Southwell (1985), political alienation has four dimensions: 1. cynicism or distrust (individuals' negative perception of the honesty and capabilities of politicians and political institutions); 2. powerlessness (individuals feel they she cannot influence the political process); 3. meaninglessness (political parties do not offer meaningful choices among candidates and issues; and the outcomes are therefore unpredictable); and 4. apathy or indifference (individuals simply are not interested in politics regardless of their political efficacy). Whether individuals choose to participate in politics, they argue, does not depend on the number of obstacles in the system but whether these individuals feel that they have a reason to get involved.

There is a general agreement that the media play an important role in U.S. politics in general and in elections in particular (Graber, 1994; Joslyn, 1984; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995). As Patterson put it, what the voters learn about political campaigns "is not the real campaign but the media's version of it" (1980: 9).

The news media have been criticized for adding to the negativity of political environment. For example, Fallows (1996) and Sabato (1993) have pointed out that media coverage of politics has been largely negative, which has led to the already high level of citizens' and especially the younger generation's cynicism and negativism (Tolchin, 1996; Bennett, 1997).

Paid media such as television commercials are under direct control of the candidates, who can convey information of their choice to the electorate.

A significant number of voters feel that political advertising helps them make voting decisions in general (Faber & Storey, 1985), and even sometimes contains more issue information than the news media (Patterson & McClure, 1976)[1].

More and more political advertisements, however, are "attack ads" (Garramone, 1984; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989; Jamieson, 1992), which directly contribute to the negativity of politics in this environment and may play a role in the alienation of the voting public.

For example, as mentioned earlier, the number of non-partisans has been increasing, and these independents are disgusted and turned away by negative political ads (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1990). Moreover, researchers recently have found that voters can be alienated by negative ads for their candidate from the same party (Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1997). In other words, attack ads can have a "backlash" effect, leading to negative impressions toward the sponsor -- and not the target -- of the ad.

Hypotheses

Exposure to negative advertising could potentially have several effects on a viewer. Three effects are examined here.

First, the ad could provide the viewer with much needed information about the candidates. Indeed, providing information is the rationale political strategists use for running the attack ads. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

H1: The more that individuals are exposed to negative advertising, the more they will know about the candidates' positions on issues mentioned in the ads.

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[1] For a thorough review of the effects of political advertising, see Faber (1992).

Second, the ad could provide the viewer with cues as to the importance of campaign issues. In other words, the negative advertising can have an agenda-setting influence on the viewer. Thus, the second hypothesis is:

H2: The more that individuals are exposed to negative advertising, the more concern they will have for the issues mentioned in the ads.

Finally, the ad could make the viewer cynical toward the election process. The negative ads may influence the viewer into thinking that neither candidate is worthy of their vote and therefore the political process is flawed. Thus, the third hypothesis is:

H3: The more that individuals are exposed to negative advertising, the more politically alienated they will feel.

Methodology

Data were collected through a telephone survey conducted in the Eugene/Springfield, Oregon, area in 1996. The survey period began approximately two weeks after the January 30 deadline for mailing in ballots and ended near the end of March.

The election involved Oregon's special election to replace U.S. Senator Bob Packwood, who had resigned a few months earlier. The campaign pitted Democrat Ron Wyden, the winner, against Republican Gordon Smith. It was the first Senate election in the United States ever to be conducted entirely by mail. The election was marked by several extremely negative advertisements.

Respondents were randomly selected from Lane County voting records. Only registered voters were interviewed. The 95 precincts were stratified by socio-economic status and past liberal-conservative voting trends, then 19 randomly selected precincts were chosen from these subpopulations in proportion to their presence in the entire 95 precincts. Thus, this stratified sample closely matched the overall makeup of the area surveyed.

We then sampled from five different subpopulations of registered voters based on their voting turnout patterns in the three most-recent senatorial elections: the 1996 U.S. Senate election, the primary for this election in the fall of 1995, and the November, 1992, Senate election. The first three groups voted in the January runoff; the last two did not. The five groups were:

* **The Steady Voter:** respondents who voted in 1992, the 1995 primary and the 1996 Senate elections.

* **The Recent Voter:** respondents who voted in the 1995 primary and the 1996 election, but did not vote in the 1992 election.

* **The Non-Primary Voter:** respondents who voted in the 1992 and 1996 elections, but did not vote in the 1995 primary.

* **The Non-January Voter:** respondents who voted in 1992 and the 1995 primary, but did not vote in the 1996 election.

* **The Primary-Only Voter:** respondents who voted in the 1995 primary, but did not vote in the 1992 or 1996 elections.

The last two groups both had voted by mail in the 1995 primary election, yet did not vote in the 1996 election.

It should be noted that the use of voting records hampered the overall completion rate in a couple of ways. Some of the voters did not list a phone number. In these cases, the local phone directory was consulted. Unlisted numbers, however, could not be determined. In addition, the phone numbers that were listed on the voting records had not recently been updated, which resulted in a larger number of disconnected numbers than would be expected had we utilized a random sample from the phone directory. Regardless, the completion rate was 58 percent of all those sampled from the precincts, an acceptable rate according to Babbie (1973). In all, 308 surveys were completed.

Interviews were conducted by trained graduate and undergraduate students. The questionnaire dealt with several aspects of the 1996 U.S. Senate election, including issues concerning negative advertising and the Senate campaign overall.

Variables

* **Negative advertising exposure:** We asked respondents: "During the Senate campaign, how often would you say that you saw negative advertising, that is a commercial run by one candidate that directly attacks his opponent. Would you say you saw negative advertisements: Several times a day, a couple of times a day, about once a day, a couple of times a week, about once a week, or less than once a week." This item was used as the independent variable in the data analysis. The item is a standard question used frequently by previous researchers (see Lemert, Elliott, Bernstein, Rosenberg & Nestvold, 1991)

* **Issue salience:** We asked respondents if they were extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, a little concerned or not at all concerned with three issues that were mentioned prominently in negative advertising run during the campaign. The issues were environment, Medicare costs and abortion.

* **Political knowledge:** We asked respondents if they knew which Senate candidate: Had his business fined for pollution (Gordon Smith), voted to cut Medicare benefits (Ron Wyden) and supported restrictions on abortion rights (Gordon Smith). All information had been contained in negative advertising run during the campaign.

* **Political alienation:** We asked respondents if they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following statements: I don't think public officials care much what people like me think; Sometimes, politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on; People like me don't have any say about what the government does; A good many elections aren't important enough to bother with; Under our form of government, the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office; I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics; I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people. We also summed the responses to the statements after reversing the codes on the "positive" statements to create a political alienation index. A higher score on this index would indicate a higher level of political alienation.

Results

A series of T-tests was used to test Hypothesis 1, whether exposure to negative advertising led to knowledge gain by respondents in our survey. The T-tests compared the mean scores on the negative advertising exposure measure for two groups: the respondents answering correctly and the respondents answering incorrectly to each of the three knowledge recall questions. If Hypothesis 1 is supported, the group of individuals answering correctly will report higher levels of exposure to negative advertising than the group answering incorrectly. In other words, the higher the level of exposure to negative advertising, the more likely the respondent would have answered correctly to each of the three knowledge questions.

Table 1 lists the results for the tests of Hypothesis 1. As the table shows, none of the means for the group of individuals answering correctly were significantly larger than the means for the group of individuals answering incorrectly. In fact, only one test -- that for abortion knowledge -- produced a T of larger than 1.0. This largest T also was the result of the group that answered incorrectly reporting higher exposure to negative advertising than the group that answered correctly -- the opposite of the prediction in Hypothesis 1. Clearly, exposure to negative advertising did not lead to knowledge acquisition as stated in Hypothesis 1.

To test Hypothesis 2 and 3, Pearson correlations were computed. For Hypothesis 2, which predicted that high exposure to negative advertising would be related to high concern with the issues mentioned in the ads, the respondents' concern scores were correlated with their level of exposure to negative advertising. Table 2 lists the results.

None of the concern measures were positively correlated with exposure to negative advertising. In fact, one relationship was statistically significant in the direction opposite of that predicted in Hypothesis 2. Here, the more exposure to negative advertising that individuals reported, the less they were concerned with the issue of abortion.

Table 2 also shows the results of the tests for Hypothesis 3, which predicted that exposure to negative advertising would led to strong feelings of political alienation. Here, one correlation was statistically significant: the more exposure to negative advertising, the more likely respondents would agree with the statement that "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think." In other words, exposure to negative advertising was related to one political alienation measure. None of the other correlations, including the correlation for the political alienation index, were statistically significant.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine three potential effects of exposure to negative advertising: knowledge acquisition, issue salience and political alienation. The results from our telephone survey indicate that exposure to negative advertising had very little influence in any of these three areas.

First, individuals correctly answering three questions dealing with information contained in negative ads run during the 1996 U.S. Senate campaign in Oregon did not report higher exposure to the ads than did individuals answering incorrectly to the same questions. Two explanations seem plausible.

On the one hand, the results could be showing that negative advertising is very effective and memorable. A few exposures could suffice in increasing knowledge levels about candidates. In other words, high exposure is not necessary for information to be passed on to viewers of the ads. Repeated exposures, then, do not increase the ability to recall information contained in the negative advertisements. Respondents here could have learned the information contained in the ads through very few exposures.

On the other hand, the results may be showing that negative ads are very ineffective. High exposure does not increase knowledge levels. Individuals, in fact, may be so turned off by the negative advertisements that they do not pay attention to them and thus do not learn information contained in them.

The data here do not offer a clear indication of which explanation is more plausible. On the one hand, more individuals overall answered correctly on two of the three knowledge recall questions, regardless of their level of advertising exposure, lending some support for the notion that negative advertising was an effective way of transmitting information. Only for the Medicare cuts knowledge question did more than half the respondents answer incorrectly.

On the other hand, respondents could have learned this information from sources other than the ads. For example, the environmental knowledge question was especially easily recalled, with only 38 respondents answering incorrectly to 224 answering correctly. The fact that a factory owned by Gordon Smith had been fined for polluting Oregon waters, however, had been heavily reported in the news media. Indeed, Faber (1992) has argued that learning may depend at least partially upon the availability of information from other sources. And O'Keefe and Sheinkopf (1974) have found that newspapers and television news are much more important sources of information for individuals than is advertising.

Regardless of the explanation, the findings here suggest that individuals' level of exposure to negative advertising does not affect their ability to acquire knowledge. Thus, negative advertising does not appear to be very effective in transmitting information to potential voters.

Second, exposure to negative advertising was not related to individuals' level of concern with issues contained in the ads. In other words, the negative advertisements did not have an agenda-setting influence on our respondents. As with the results on knowledge acquisition, the findings here could again point to the ads having a great agenda-setting influence -- little exposure is as effective as a great deal of exposure. Or negative advertising exposure could have little agenda-setting influence on individuals -- a great deal of exposure did not make the issues more salient than a little exposure.

Another possible explanation is that viewers could have raised their defenses to avoid being influenced by the information in the ads. Viewers may have realized that the issue information in the ads is emphasized for a specific purpose -- to promote the ad sponsor's image. Thus, individuals would be less affected by the subjective advertisement than they would be for the arguably more objective news media.

The findings here, nonetheless, again suggest that exposure to negative advertising is not very important. Individuals' level of exposure to negative advertising did not affect how important the issues mentioned in the ads were viewed by individuals.

Finally, the results here show only partial support for the notion that exposure to negative advertising increases the likelihood that individuals will feel politically alienated. The more exposure to negative advertising respondents reported, the more likely they were to agree with the statement that "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think." Thus, the only variable that was linked to exposure to negative advertising was also the only variable included in our study that demonstrated a negative consequence of negative advertising -- feelings of political alienation.

Admittedly, this finding was the only statistically significant result of the eight political alienation measures examined here. Thus, there is the possibility that this result was merely Type I error -- a statistically significant result due to chance.

On the other hand, this finding does show that exposure to negative advertising could have a serious negative influence on society as a whole. The attack ads show neither of the candidates are suitable for public office. If individuals see ad after ad claiming the candidates for public office are terribly flawed, it logically follows that viewers will feel that the political process itself is flawed.

If exposure to negative advertising produces this one negative effect on individuals, would this effect diminish if negative advertising disappeared? Our survey offered an important opportunity to test this question. In the U.S. Senate election in Oregon, one candidate, Democrat Ron Wyden, pulled all of his negative advertising with just over a week left in the campaign. Wyden said he felt the mudslinging on both sides had escalated out of control. It was a calculated risk, which apparently paid off, since Wyden won the election despite being behind in the polls throughout the campaign.

To test the effects of Wyden's decision to pull his negative advertising, we asked respondents whether they recalled any announcement Wyden made about a change in his ads. We categorized the respondents on whether or not they accurately recalled that the announcement involved Wyden promising to not run any more attack ads. We then ran a series of T-tests examining whether the group that accurately recalled Wyden's decision differed on the political alienation measures with the group that did not recall Wyden's decision. The logic here was that if individuals could recall that one candidate promised to stop running negative ads, this would make them feel more positively about the political process overall. The results appear in Table 3.

As Table 3 shows, three tests were statistically significant in the predicted direction. In these three cases, if individuals accurately recalled

Wyden's announcement that he would no longer run attack ads, respondents felt more positively about the political process. Thus, running positive ads can have a positive influence on society.

Overall, then, the results here suggest limited effects of exposure to negative advertising. Of course, several factors may have mitigated the magnitude of negative advertising exposure. Our knowledge measures did involve the open-ended, unaided recall questions that typically produce low recall (Faber, 1992) -- though more than half of our respondents did answer correctly to two of the three questions.

In addition, respondents surveyed here may have practiced selective exposure. Several classic studies have found that individuals were selective in their exposure of information in telethons (Schramm & Carter, 1959) and in newspapers (Greenberg, 1965; Stempel, 1961). Indeed, respondents here may have been so disgusted with the attack ads that, while reporting that they saw them often, they did not necessarily pay attention to them.

Regardless, the results here call into question the usefulness of negative advertising. Our respondents did not learn the relative importance of issues from the ads. Our respondents did not learn important information from the ads. The only consequence of negative advertising found here was an increase in the attitude that politicians don't care about voters.

While the results here show the ineffectiveness of negative advertising, several scholars have warned against overgeneralizing about the power of attack ads. West (1993), for example, cautions that many previous critics of attack ads lump all negative advertising together, assuming that all negative advertisements function similarly. Certainly, some ads under some circumstances can be more effective than others.

But with the total lack of any positive consequences of attack ads found here, and the potential for some attack ads to backfire -- as Lemert, Elliott, Bernstein, Rosenberg and Nestvold (1991) found with the Bush campaign in 1988 and as Roberts (1995) found with the Bush campaign in 1992 -- a question arises: Why do campaign strategists continue to rely so heavily on negative advertising?

Future research may survey campaign managers to investigate the underlying strategies for using attack ads, as well as other consequences -- both positive and negative -- of negative advertising.

Table 1. Means and T-Test results comparing respondents answering correctly and incorrectly and their level of exposure to negative advertising.

	Correct Answer Mean	Incorrect Answer Mean	T-score	Sign.
Medical knowledge	5.02	4.94	0.54	0.592
Environment knowledge	4.99	4.87	0.55	0.582
Abortion knowledge	4.90	5.11	1.32	0.187

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficients comparing variables to level of exposure to negative advertising.

	Pearson coefficient
Concern with Environment	.020
Concern with Medical costs	.085
Concern with Abortion	-.125*
Public officials don't care about people like me	.151*
Politics and government seem so complicated	.105
People like me don't have any say	.047
Many elections aren't important enought to bother with	.000
People have the final say	-.035
I could do as good a job in public office	-.021
I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics	-.057
Political alienation index	.056

* -- $p < .05$.

Table 3. Means and T-Test results comparing respondents who recalled and did not recall Wyden's announcement to pull his negative ads and their level of political alienation.

	Correct Answer Mean	Incorrect Answer Mean	T-score	Sign.
Public officials don't care about people like me	3.14	3.211	0.43	.670
Politics and government seem so complicated	2.86	2.91	0.32	.746
People like me don't have any say	2.68	2.84	0.98	.326
Many elections aren't important enough to bother with	2.08	2.42	2.43	.016
People have the final say	2.78	2.48	2.03	.044
I could do as good a job in public office	2.82	2.73	0.56	.577
I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics	3.63	3.28	2.40	.017
Political alienation index	20.58	19.85	1.34	.181

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Sensational: A Comparison of Content and Presentation Styles of the *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* Television News Magazines

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Presented to the
Mass Communication and Society Division
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1997 Conference in Chicago, Illinois

Sensational: A Comparison of Content and Presentation Styles of the *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* Television News Magazines

Abstract

This paper summarizes research findings on sensationalism and tabloidism in television news programming. Research consisted of a content analysis of 329 news magazine segments airing on CBS's *60 Minutes* and on *Dateline NBC* . Content and presentation styles were compared. *60 Minutes* ' content remained consistent as primarily serious and informational. The two news magazines aired a similar proportion of entertainment segments between 1993 and 1995. *Dateline's* presentation style was significantly more sensational and less factual.

Sensational: A Comparison of Content and Presentation Styles of the *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* Television News Magazines

The topic of sensationalism creeping into the content of mainstream American network television news programming has received sporadic attention by both the national press and academic researchers in the last two decades. (1) Recent examples of controversial television news coverage include the O.J. Simpson criminal and civil trials; the JonBennet Ramsey murder case, the murder of Ennis Cosby, and the Heaven's Gate cult mass suicides. While it is common knowledge that the major television networks' nightly news programs have been steadily declining in overall ratings, their television news magazine programs have proliferated and have garnered high ratings and revenues. (2)

In his study of television uses and gratifications, Alan Rubin found that there are complex factors comprising viewers' motivations. (3) Rubin concluded that there are two main types of television viewers. The first type watches television out of habit and for entertainment purposes. The second main type of television viewer uses the medium to learn about events and people. In their 1992 study of the hard and soft news content of the national network TV news programs, David Scott and Robert Gobetz note that play theory describes the consumption of news as a voluntary act that is satisfying in and of itself. (4) They stated that both play theory and uses and gratifications theory support Wilbur Schramm's argument that news consumption can be guided by pleasure motives. On the seemingly ubiquitous entertainment focused medium of television, are television news magazine programs more entertainment or news oriented?

Perhaps the 1995 incident in which CBS's *60 Minutes* admitted to secretly videotaping an individual (although that video did not actually air) and the November 17, 1992 *Dateline NBC* segment titled "Waiting to Explode," are two of the more memorable examples in which network television news magazine producers and reporters have been criticized for using sensationalistic journalism approaches. (5)

Pulitzer Prize winning reporter Carl Bernstein has been one of the outspoken critics of what he calls "trash" journalism which encourages cynicism, untruth, titillation, and distortion. (6) While Bernstein admits that sensationalism and gossip have always had a role in newspapers, he argues that trash TV programs allows an "Idiot Culture" to triumph in the America of the 1990s.

Teresa Keller stated that the topic of trash TV began being seriously addressed in the United States in 1988, when ABC-TV's Jeff Greenfield addressed the 1988 Radio and Television News Directors' Association meeting. (7) Keller defined trash TV as consisting mostly of talk programs and news magazines such as the recently cancelled *A Current Affair*, and the syndicated program *Inside Edition*. Keller wrote that the following elements help to define trash TV: sex and violence content, confusion between news and entertainment, hyped language, music which connotates fear, uncertainty, and anticipation, and re-creations. She also cited examples of ABC, CBS, and NBC allowing magazine shows to occasionally use re-enactments which changed the standards of TV news. (8)

The purpose of this study is to attempt to measure any changes in the presentation style and content of relatively early editions of the CBS's award winning *60 Minutes* news magazine, compared to more modern day *60 Minutes* programs. And to also compare the content and style of *60 Minutes* with that of the relative newcomer *Dateline NBC* which began airing in 1992. Of particular interest in this study are story presentations which have been defined by past research as being entertainment oriented and sensationalistic.

Literature Review

Graham Knight's 1989 article on tabloid television news identified tabloid television journalism as a distinct genre. (9) Knight wrote that TV tabloidism's roots can be found in earlier scandal sheets, the sports press, the "yellow" journalism of the nineteenth century and the muck-raking journalism of the early twentieth century. Knight stated "Tabloid still operates within the broad organizational and representational parameters of news production; its distinctiveness is one of topic, accent, emphasis and style." (10) Knight wrote that tabloid TV's staples are crime, corruption, and scandal. He stated that tabloid TV generally eschews coverage of weighty political and economic issues. Knight concluded that there are two main characteristics of tabloid TV. First, there is considerable emphasis on coverage of events and issues which concern moral disorders and consequent effects. Tabloid's focus is more on the immediate issues of deviance, conflict, and threats to or disruption of, everyday life. This focus on the part of tabloid TV news, has led to its reputation for exaggeration, over-dramatization, and to its appealing to the prurient and to sensationalism. (11) The other main characteristic of tabloid TV, according to Knight, is the emphasis on the "subjective" in coverage. He cited as an example, that almost every tabloid TV human interest story focuses on how an individual feels and reacts, while also playing up the presence and personality of the reporter. These techniques have earned tabloid TV news its reputation for bias and trivialization.

Mark Harmon defined sensationalism in television news coverage as coverage of violent crime, disasters, and accidents. (12) William Davie and Jung-Sook Lee wrote that while the Radio-Television News Directors Association's Code of Ethics encourages members to reject sensationalism in any form, the themes of sex and violence are prevalent. (13)

Knight wrote that tabloid TV began in the U.S. in the early 1970s with the happy talk formats of local TV news operations in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. He stressed that the differences were then not so much in style and content as in differences in detail and in the way style and content are combined. (14) Knight stressed that tabloid TV represents a blurring between fiction and non-fiction. He stated that, partially due to technological advances, what he called "representation" increasingly overwhelms the object of a news story in a deluge of images and words. (15) In other words, the "real" is overwhelmed by representation. Knight stated that tabloid TV is absorbed with the "now" and takes an a historical perspective to many of its stories. Basic tabloid techniques include use of the present tense and use of colloquialisms such as the words "cops" and "feds." Another important tabloid technique is to tell the story through actuality pictures and sound. (16) Knight wrote that there is a distinct flavor of populism in tabloid TV. In short, tabloid TV news is an ideology of feelings.

In 1990, Elizabeth Bird noted that journalism of any kind involves storytelling. (17) She stated that tabloid newswriters defend their approach of use of a formulaic style as an approach used by other reporters. Tabloid writers, according to Bird, state that they find the "story" within a event and shape it to fit a particular construction of reality. Bird wrote that print tabloid reporters tended to abdicate credibility responsibility to their sources. She wrote that tabloids stress entertainment over information. Bird noted that "straight" reporters are torn because they realize that they have to be entertaining or they'll lose their audience. (18)

David Scott and Robert Gobetz wrote that "Whetmore indicated hard news is factually based while soft news is background information including opinion and color." (19) Their 1992 study was done to determine whether TV network news programs had increased their coverage of soft news between 1972 and 1987. The researchers found that, while the overall proportion of soft news remained relatively small at around 10 percent of all news, there was an incremental upward trend in the use of soft news during that period. Scott and Gobetz concluded that ". . . . it is possible to build a newscast that is newsworthy by definition with stories that emphasize human interest values." (20)

Bert Briller stated that it is getting harder to tell the media apart due to the blurring of lines between TV news and entertainment. (21) Briller cited the use of network TV news anchor people as anchors or co-anchors of network news magazine programs, as a move that has raised the status of TV news magazine programs.

In his 1993 *Journalism Monograph*, Michael Curtin wrote that even the pre-cursor to today's TV news magazine programs, the TV documentaries of the 1950s and 1960s, were expected to be entertaining in order to garner high ratings. (22) Curtin stated that:

> Indeed, (CBS) executive producer Don Hewitt touts himself as the inventive genius behind the introduction of narrative style and claims that this innovation was a reaction against documentary conventions of the early 1960s . . . ."I said to myself, 'I'll bet if we made it multisubject and we made it personal journalism--instead of dealing with issues we told stories; if we packaged reality as well as Hollywood packages fiction, I'll bet we could double the rating.'" (23)

Curtin wrote that these programs were expected to create an illusion of "realism." He concluded his monograph by asking if TV news is not strictly factual anymore, why does it strain so hard to present the illusion that it mirrors reality?

David Schoelle wrote that TV news has consistently evolved in a direction that dovetails with the tabloid form. (24) He stated that like all mass commodities, television as a cultural commodity is suffering from a degradation of quality. Schoelle agrees with Knight that the tabloid TV news form combines fiction and non-fiction within a continuum of effects. Schoelle wrote that tabloids fragment different fiction and non-fiction genres and eventually draw the viewer into the blurred product.

Dwight Dewerth-Pallmeyer and Paul Hirsch performed an exploratory study of the organizational structures of syndicated tabloid news magazines compared to the more traditional network news magazine programs. (25) The authors noted that a whole new genre of TV news programs developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s with labels such as infotainment, tabloids, and trash TV. They noted that media critics had begun charging that infotainment techniques had begun seeping into standard broadcast journalism shows. Dewerth-Pallmeyer and Hirsch wrote that most programs did not have rigid criteria for selection of news stories. Most producers, however, stressed the need to attract an audience. At the organizational level of analysis, it was found that most program staffs cited goals of obtaining adequate ratings and enlightening the viewers. Success was measured via ratings and the in-house determination of the quality of each program. The researchers concluded that viewers should not be surprised when seeing traditional news magazine programs using recreations and/or sexy program topics. They also wrote that it should be no surprise to find tabloid programs copying successful news show formats.

Kevin Stoker reported on a systems analysis of news organizations. (26) He wrote that since news magazine programs cost the networks half as much money to produce, high ratings for such shows translate into high profits. Stoker noted that NBC was targeting its *Dateline* program at a younger audience and that it was initially a joint production of the NBC news and entertainment divisions. (27) Stoker wrote that "News organizations openly create, manage, and change reality in the same way other organizations perform the same tasks in less conspicuous ways." (28) The researcher used the November 17, 1992 *Dateline* "Waiting to Explode," segment as an example of a lowering of network TV news standards. NBC apologized to General Motors for a misleading demonstration showing a GM pickup truck exploding. He wrote that "In the case of the "Dateline" piece, the producer risked violating professional standards in an effort to make the product more competitive." (29)

James Marra and Maria Grabe defined tabloid news as being a hybrid between fiction and highbrow, or traditional news. (30) Marra and Grabe concluded that the *Hard Copy* program genre type employs a combination of strategies and techniques which are becoming an essential component of network TV programming. (31)

Joseph Russomanno and Stephen Everett studied the blurring of boundaries between TV newscasts, news magazines and tabloids. (32) They noted that the relatively recent proliferation of network TV news magazines has seen an increase in the accusations of sensationalism. (33) A definition of tabloidism, which they found conceptually useful, was "sensationalized trivia, pandering to a craving for amusement and voyeurism, instead of providing facts needed for good citizenship." (34) Russomanno and Everett noted that the word tabloid applies not only to content but to style. The researchers constructed a coding instrument based upon, in part, previous research done by Elizabeth Bird and Philip Weiss (35). The researchers performed a factor analysis on 20 attribute measures and in order to achieve a simple structure identified four main factors as, objectivity, scandal, sensational, and hope. (36)

Russomanno and Everett found that tabloid programs tended to reflect more "tabloid" elements in every factor category cited above except for "dramatized hope." They concluded that differences between the tabloids and news magazines do exist although they are less pronounced than differences between tabloids and regular newscasts. One surprising finding from their research was that CBS's *60 Minutes* rated near the top in the scandal factor. They wrote:

> To claim that "60 Minutes," long considered a bastion of broadcast journalism, is more scandal-driven than are any number of other programs down the list might raise eyebrows in many circles. However, the coded items loading upon this factor included those which measured whether a story dealt with scandals and unofficial charges, and whether coverage invaded one's privacy. In spite of its predominantly positive reputation, "60 Minutes" has achieved its standing, in part, by covering many stories that fit this description and by utilizing ambush journalism techniques. (37)

60 Minutes, however, ranked favorably in all of the other factors.

Russomanno and Everett concluded that while the lines separating network newscasts, news magazines, and tabloid television programs may be blurring, they do remain largely intact. (38) They found that while news magazines do remain distinct from tabloids, the differences may be blurring somewhat.

Research Questions

Based upon the literature review, two main research questions were posed. First, does the relatively "new" network TV news magazine *Dateline NBC* which targets younger TV viewers, feature more entertainment oriented segments and more sensational stories, than a more established network TV news magazine such as *60 Minutes*? Also, considering the proliferation of network TV news magazine programs since the early 1990s, has the award winning and highly rated CBS news magazine *60 Minutes* changed to a more entertainment oriented style when compared to *60 Minutes* programs from 1978-1980, some 15 years earlier?

Methodology

A content analysis of a total of six years of selected television news magazines programs was performed. In selecting the samples for this study, the researcher was interested in establishing a baseline of content and presentation style from a network TV news magazine program prior to any real or perceived influences of the tabloid TV news magazine programs of the 1980s and 1990s. Three years of transcripts from *60 Minutes* programs from 1978-1980 were selected. Another factor in selecting samples for this study was any long-term adjustments made by network news magazines in content and style due perhaps to, among other factors, increased competition and as a result of the scandalous November 1992 segment of *Dateline NBC* titled "Waiting to Explode." Three years of transcripts from segments, airing 1993 through 1995, from both *Dateline NBC* and *60 Minutes* were examined.

The unit of analysis was the transcript of each news magazine program segment. A total of 329 segments over the total of six years were analyzed. The coding instrument was composed based upon instruments used in past content analyses with some slight modifications made for the TV news magazine genre. Guido Stempel, in 1985, modified the Deutschmann coding categories for his study of story selection in nine national media in the United States. (39) General content categories of serious/informational versus soft/entertainment were developed based upon previous research in this area by Bird (40), and from an article by John Pauly. (41) Pauly wrote:

> American journalists consider serious professional work as that which informs rather than entertains its audience. Journalists articulate this distinction across a variety of practices and discourses. The preference for hard news to feature stories (which for so many years was in part a preference for the male news work of politics and business as opposed to the soft feminine news work of "social" reporting) rests on the information-entertainment distinction. (42)

TV news magazine presentation styles were coded according to guidelines previously published by Dan Nimmo and James Combs in their research of network news. (43) These slightly modified coding guidelines were as follows; the "elitist/factual" style of TV news presentation was characterized as being composed of an unemotional delivery, recounting of facts-events, verifiable information and interpretive information presented so that the audience can make rational judgments. The "ignorant/didactic" style of presentation consists of, factual information stripped of all its complexities, news divided into small comprehensible segments, expressed in non-technical language, with comprehension being the central goal, trading off precision and sophistication. The "tabloid/sensationalistic" style of presenting TV news was defined as, stressing violence, sex, and human interest matter, stories about celebrities and/or ordinary people plagued by wrenching problems (and sometimes experiencing great joy), the language is hyped, coverage of who, what, and where is emphasized, the facts are unclear, and there is emphasis on the arousal of emotions and empathy. See the Appendix for copies of the coding sheet and coding instructions.

Intercoder reliability, established on the basis of agreement ranged from 83% for story content classification to 89% for segment and style type. Overall coder reliability for this study was 87%. (44)

Results

A Spearman's Rho rank correlation analysis was performed on the modified Deutschmann content category listing outlined in Tables 1 and 2 on pages 11 and 12. In terms of 1993-1995 comparison between the network news magazine programs *Dateline NBC* and *60 Minutes* on CBS, it was found that the NBC program had a significantly greater emphasis on stories about crime and popular amusements. The CBS news magazine put a greater emphasis on stories concerning public health and welfare, on politics and government acts, and on war and defense issues. Both programs rated high on the general human interest category of news stories which Scott and Gobetz categorize as "soft news content." (45) When comparing 1978-80 and 1993-1995 *60 Minutes*' content, the crime category ranked first in the earlier versions of *60 Minutes*, while most other categories remained consistent across the two time periods.

Table 1
Story Content Classification Totals Using the Deutchsmann Category System (Spearman's Rho Rank Ordering for *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* 1993-1995 Comparisons)

	Content	*Dateline NBC*	*60 Minutes*	D	D2
1	Politics & Gov't Acts	(5)	(2)	3	9
2	War and Defense	(12.5)	(5)	7	49
3	Diplomacy & Foreign Relations	(10)	(9)	1	1
4	Economic Activity	(6)	(8)	2	4
5	Agriculture	(15)	(14.5)	.5	.25
6	Transportation and Travel	(8)	(12)	4	16
7	Crime	(1)	(3)	2	4
8	Public Moral Problems	(10)	(10)	0	0
9	Accidents/Disasters	(10)	(12)	2	4
10	Science/ Invention	(7)	(14.5)	6.5	42.25
11	Public Health/Welf.	(4)	(1)	3	9
12	Education/Class. Arts	(12.5)	(5.5)	7	49
13	Popular Amusements	(2)	(7)	5	25
14	General Human Inter.	(3)	(4)	1	1
15	Other	(14)	(12)	.5	.25

The critical Spearman's Rho value for 15 ranks is .441 which is significant at the .05 level (.6183)

Table 2
Story Content Classification Totals Using the Deutchsmann Category System (Spearman's Rho Rank Ordering for *60 Minutes* '78-'80 and '93-'95 Comparisons)

	Content	1978-1980	1993-1995	D	D2
1	Politics & Gov't Acts	(4)	(2)	2	4
2	War and Defense	(8.5)	(5.5)	3	9
3	Diplomacy & Foreign Relations	(4)	(9)	5	25
4	Economic Activity	(8.5)	(8)	.5	.25
5	Agriculture	(12)	(14.5)	2.5	6.25
6	Transportation and Travel	(12)	(12)	0	0
7	Crime	(1)	(3)	2	4
8	Public Moral Problems	(15)	(10)	5	25
9	Accidents/Disasters	(14)	(12)	2	4
10	Science/ Invention	(10)	(14.5)	2.5	6.25
11	Public Health/Welf.	(2)	(1)	1	1
12	Education/Class. Arts	(6)	(5.5)	.5	.25
13	Popular Amusements	(4)	(7)	3	9
14	General Human Inter.	(7)	(4)	3	9
15	Other	(12)	(12)	0	0

The critical Spearman's Rho value for 15 ranks is .623 which is significant at the .01 level (.81608)

A Chi-Square analysis was performed and the analysis shows that the three programs differed in content types at a statistically significant level. See Table 3.

Table 3
Type of News Magazine Content Segment Overall in Numbers and Percentages

	"60 Min." '78-'80		"Dateline NBC" '93-'95		"60 Min." 93-'95	
Serious/ Informational	54	58.1%	57	40.8%	53	55.8%
Soft/ Entertainment	23	24.7%	45	32.1%	30	31.6%
Unclear/ Mixture	16	17.2%	38	27.1%	12	12.6%
TOTALS	93	100%	140	100%	95	100%

Chi Square = 11.54866 df= 4 $p < .05$

In the 1993-1995 time period, *60 Minutes* aired approximately one-third more serious news segments in its news magazine than did the NBC program. *Dateline NBC* and the CBS program aired approximately the same number of "soft/entertainment" segments in that time period. *60 Minutes* remained consistent as to the amount of "serious/informational" segments across the time periods 1978-1980 and 1993-1995, while the proportion of soft/entertainment news segment increased by about 20 percent in the latter time period. A year-by-year breakdown of TV news magazine content shows a drop in total serious segments between *Dateline NBC* and *60 Minutes* combined from nearly 49 percent in 1993 down to 40 percent in 1995. Chi square = 3.94 df =1 $p < .05$.

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Table 4 shows the statistically significant differences in segment presentation style among the TV news magazines studied.

Table 4
Style of News Magazine Story Presentation Overall in Numbers and Percentages

	"60 Min." '78-'80		"Dateline NBC" '93-'95		"60 Min." '93-'95	
Elitist/Fact.	55	58.5%	41	29.3%	45	47.4%
Ignorant/ Didactic	33	35.1%	64	45.7%	40	42.1%
Sensational/ Tabloid	6	6.4%	35	25.0%	10	10.5%
TOTALS	94	100%	140	100%	95	100%

Chi Square = 28.07600 df=4 p < .01

During the 1993-1995 time period, almost one-half of the *60 Minutes* story segments were presented in the elitist/factual style. Slightly less than one-third of the *Dateline NBC* segments were presented in this style. Both news magazines presented about 40 percent of their stories in the ignorant/didactic style. The NBC program presented 25 percent of its program segments in the sensationalistic/tabloid style, while the CBS program produced 10 percent of its segments in this manner. During the 1978-1980 time period, *60 Minutes* aired 20 percent more elitist/factual style segments than it did in the 1993-1995 period. When combining the NBC and CBS magazine segments in the 1993-1995 period and comparing them against the *60 Minutes* programs from 1978-1980, the more modern day news magazines aired 36 percent of their stories in the elitist/factual style, 45 percent in the ignorant/didactic style and 19 percent in the sensationalistic/tabloid style. This compares to the 1978-1980 breakdown of 59 percent elitist/factual, 34 percent ignorant/didactic, and seven percent sensationalistic/tabloid style. Chi square = 16.49 df= 2 p < .01

Discussion

This study found some support regarding the first research question which was, does the *Dateline NBC* program feature more entertainment and more sensational stories than a more established TV news magazine program such as *60 Minutes* on CBS? The content analysis confirms that the NBC program has a significantly greater sensational or tabloid like presentation style. Concerning content, however, while the CBS news magazine definitely presented a greater proportion of serious news stories, the percentage of entertainment oriented segments was about equal, at about 30 percent for both, for the 1993-95 time period studied.

This content analysis also provided limited support to the question of whether the CBS news magazine adopted a more entertainment oriented style from 1993-1995 when compared to 1978-1980. *60 Minutes* has made some limited changes in both content and in presentation style during the two time periods studied, however, the basic content and presentation style of the program appears to be consistent for the time periods studied. The CBS news magazine has slightly increased the number of entertainment oriented segments in its more modern version and the program has curtailed its elitist/factual presentation style somewhat when compared to its output from 1978-1980.

Richard Campbell quoted *60 Minutes* inventor and producer Don Hewitt as saying "*60 Minutes* has single-handedly ruined television. No one can report news today without making money." (46) Hewitt, according to Campbell, estimates that *60 Minutes* earns over $70 million a year for CBS. Hewitt and others at CBS describe the *60 Minutes* reporting style as a collection of morality plays and describe the program segments as 13 minute detective dramas with the reporters as star players. (47) Hewitt stated that there is a fine line between show business and the news business and that the trick for a reporter is to step-up to the line but not go over it.

This study has shown that the TV news magazine content and presentation style between *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* did differ to a significant extent between 1993 and 1995. The content analysis also appears to confirm the conventional wisdom that *60 Minutes* programming seems to have remained relatively consistent in content type over the past two decades. This limited study does not resolve Wilbur Schramm's quandry over whether consumers of news may be guided by pleasure motives. Alan Rubin's uses and gratifications based conclusion, that television viewers may be segmented into two distinct types, appears to be reflected in the programming decisions involving *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC*. Judgments about the usefulness and or the definitive contributions of TV news magazines are beyond the scope of this paper.

The limitations of this study include not including an analysis of transcripts from tabloid oriented programs such as *Hard Copy* and *Inside Edition* for direct comparison purposes. The recent research conducted in this area by Russomanno and Everett, however, concluded that the more traditional news magazine programs such as *60 Minutes* and *Dateline NBC* are clearly distinct from the more tabloid style news programs. Another limitation of this study is that a limited number of independent variables were examined. This paper's focus was on presentation styles and content, however, factors such as ratings and pressure for profits from the networks and their parent corporations were not closely examined as to any measurable effects that they might have on this news genre.

Further study might focus more closely on tracking the ratings and on examining the audience composition of such news magazine programs.

Case Number (Do not fill-in) ___ ___ ___ 01-03/

TV Magazine Name ___ 04/

1 = "60 Minutes" 1978-1980
2 = "Dateline NBC"
3 = "60 Minutes" 1993-1995

Date (Year-Month-Day) ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ 05-10/

Segment Name ____________________________________

Story Content Classification (Mark the category which applies to this segment) ___ ___ 11-12/

1 = Politics and Government Acts
2 = War and Defense
3 = Diplomacy and Foreign Relations
4 = Economic Activity
5 = Agriculture
6 = Transportation and Travel
7 = Crime
8 = Public Moral Problems
9 = Accidents and Disasters
10 = Science and Invention
11 = Public Health and Welfare
12 = Education and Classic Arts
13 = Popular Amusements
14 = General Human Interest
15 = Other

Type of Segment Overall ___ 13/

1 = Serious/Informational (also known as "hard news," approach using traditional criteria)
2 = Soft/Entertainment (usually human interest or popular amusement approach, or a profile)
3 = Unclear/Mixture

Style of Story Presentation Overall ___ 14/

1 = Elitist/Factual, factually based, emphasis on why and how of the story, straightforward recounting of facts and events, verifiable information, interpretive.

2 = Ignorant/Didactic, simplistic information, information divided into brief comprehensible units, story in non-technical language, the goal seems to be overall comprehension, not precise or sophisticated language.

3 = Sensationalistic/Tabloid, focus on sex, violence, crime, and/or ethical lapses whether it affects average people or celebrities. Emphasis on emotions over reason. Language is hyped. Coverage of who, what and where emphasized. Many facts seem unclear, accounts unattributed. Mixing of fiction and non-fiction.

Coder Name: ____________________

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APPENDIX-Page Two

Television News Magazine - Sutherland- Content Analysis Coding Instructions

1. Enter the number of the specific magazine program you are coding.

2. Enter year--month--and day--using numerals, example 95 12 25.

3. Print in the segment name, the title given the segment, listed on the transcript.

6. Enter the classification of the TV news magazine segment. Guidelines listed below:

Politics and Government Acts:	Government acts and politics at the local, state and national level.
War and Defense:	War, defense, rebellion, military use of space. Includes both foreign and domestic stories.
Diplomacy and Foreign Relations:	Both foreign and domestic items dealing with diplomacy and foreign relations. Includes United Nations.
Economic Activity:	General economic activity, prices, money, labor, wages and natural resources.
Agriculture:	Farming, farm prices and economic aspects of agriculture.
Transportation and Travel	Transportation and travel, including economic aspects.
Public Moral Problems:	Human relations and moral problems including alcohol, divorce, sex, race relations, and civil court proceedings.
Accidents and Disasters:	Both man-made accidents and natural disasters.
Science and Invention:	Science other than defense related, and other than health and medicine.
Public Health and Welfare:	Health, public welfare, social and safety measures, welfare of children, and marriage and marriage relations.
Education and Classic Arts:	Education, classic arts, religion, and philanthropy.
Popular Amusements:	Entertainment and amusements, sports, TV, radio, and other media.
General Human Interest:	Human interest, weather, obits, animals, cute children and juvenile interest.
Other:	Use sparingly please!

7. Enter the type of segment, overall, you think the news magazine segment qualifies as; for example, a "Serious/Informational" follow traditional journalism guidelines of objectivity, accuracy, and fairness, with sources clearly identified. An overall "Soft/Entertainment" segment would focus on the emotions and human interest stories but may not leave the viewer with any significant information that they didn't have already.

8. Under item 13, mark whether the segment is classified as

"1" for Elitist/Factual, meaning that the copy is straight-forward, the information is verifiable, credible, and and the information seems to be presented so that the audience can make a rational judgment.

Mark "2" for Ignorant/Didactic if the segment seems to be stripped away of complexities, is simplistic in tone, divided into brief comprehensible units, expressed in non-technical language, and overall comprehension seems to be the goal at the expense of any precise or sophisticated language.

Enter "3" if the segment is Sensationalistic/Tabloid." It focuses on elements such as sex, violence, crime, or ethical lapses, whether it affects average people or celebrities. The segment would emphasize emotions over reason and the language would seem to be hyped. Coverage of who, what, and where would be emphasized and the facts of the story would seem unclear.

9. Be sure to write your name-in for follow-up contact if needed--

Notes

1. Krista Bradford, "The Big Sleaze," *Rolling Stone*, February 18, 1993, 39-43, 69.

Peter Viles, "News Execs Grumble About Tabloid TV," *Broadcasting and Cable*, September 27, 1993, 42-43.

2. Larry Reibstein, "The Battle of the TV News Magazine Shows," *Newsweek*, April 11, 1994, 62. As of mid-1994, 14 news magazine shows were on-air with another three forthcoming.

3. Alan Rubin, "Television Uses and Gratifications: The Interactions of Viewing Patterns and Motivations," *Journal of Broadcasting* 27, no. 1, Winter 1983, 48 & 50.

4. David Scott and Robert Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News Content of the National Broadcast Networks, 1972-1987," *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 2, 407.

5. Kevin Stoker, "NBC's 'Dateline' debacle: A Systems Analysis of News Organizations and the Public Trust," Convention paper for the 1995 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication meeting in Washington, D.C.,7.

6. George Garneau, "Trash Journalism," *Editor & Publisher* 127, no. 4, October 29, 1994, 8.

7. Teresa Keller, "Trash TV," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 4, Spring 1993, 195.

8. *Ibid*, 200 & 202.

9. Graham Knight, "Reality Effects: Tabloid Television News," *Queen's Quarterly* 96, no. 1, Spring 1989, 94.

10. *Ibid*, 94.

11. *Ibid*, 94 & 95.

12. Mark Harmon, "Mr. Gates Goes Electronic: The What and Why Questions in Local TV News," *Journalism Quarterly* 66, Winter 1989, 857-863.

13. William Davie, and Jung-Sook Lee, "Sex, Violence, and Consonance/Differentiation: An Analysis of Local TV News Values, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 1, Spring 1995, 129 & 130.

14. Knight, "Reality effects: tabloid television news," 96.

15. Knight *Ibid*, 97.

16. Knight*Ibid*, 101.

17. Elizabeth Bird, "Storytelling on the Far Side: Journalism and the Weekly Tabloid," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 no. 4, 1990, 378.

18. *Ibid*, 386.

19. David Scott and Robert Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News Content of the National Broadcast Networks, 1972-1987," *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 2, 407.

20. Ibid, 412.

21. Bert Briller, "The Tao of Tabloid Television," *Television Quarterly* 26, no. 4, 1993, 59.

22. Michael Curtin, "Packaging Reality," *Journalism Monographs* 137, February 1993, 11.

23. *Ibid*, 13.

24. David Schoelle, "Buy Our News: Tabloid Television and Commodification," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 17, no. 1, Winter 1993, 56.

25. Dwight Dewerth-Pallmeyer and Paul Hirsch, "TV News Magazines vs. The New Tabloids: Getting Past Content--An Organizational Perspective," 1994 Convention paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, 1.

26. Kevin Stoker, "NBC's 'Dateline' Debacle: A Systems Analysis of News Organizations and the Public Trust," 1995 Convention paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication meeting in Washington, D.C., 1.

27. *Ibid*, 3.

28. *Ibid*, 4.

29. *Ibid*, 7.

30. James Marra, and Maria Grabe, "Tabloid Television Exposed: The Architectural Structure of Hard Copy," 1995 Convention paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication meeting in Washington, D.C., 1.

31. *Ibid*, 18 & 19.

32. Joseph Russomanno, and Stephen Everett, "Television Newscasts, News Magazines and Tabloids: Blurring Boundaries?" 1996 Convention paper presented at the Broadcast Education Association meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, 1.

33. *Ibid*, 7, network newscasts included, *ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News*, and *NBC Nightly News*. News magazine programs included, *20/20, 48 Hours, 60 Minutes, Dateline NBC, Day One, Eye to Eye, Now, Prime Time Live*, and *Turning Point*. Tabloid programs included, *A Current Affair, American Journal, Hard Copy* and *Inside Edition*.

34. *Ibid*, 7.

35. Elizabeth Bird, *For Enquiring Minds: A Cultural Study of Supermarket Tabloids*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992, 7., and Philip Weiss, "Bad Rap for TV Tabs," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June, 1993, 38.

36. *Ibid*, 10.

37. Russomanno and Everett, " Television Newscasts, News Magazines and Tabloids: Blurring Boundaries?," 14.

38. *Ibid*, 15.

39. Guido Stempel, "Gatekeeping: The Mix of Topics and the Selection of Stories, *JournalismQuarterly* 62, no. 4, 796.

40. Bird, "Storytelling on the far side: journalism and the weekly tabloid," 377- 378. Bird wrote that the boundary between "information" regarded as important and serious, and "entertainment" regarded as trivial and perhaps even morally suspect, changes all the time.

41. John Pauley, "Rupert Murdoch and the Demonology of Professional Journalism," in *Media, Myths, and Narratives*, James W. Carey, ed. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA, 1988, 246.

42. *Ibid*, 252.

43. Dan Nimmo, and James Combs, *Nightly Horrors: Crisis Coverage by Television Network News*, The University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, Tennessee, 1985, 28 & 40.

44. Guido Stempel and Bruce Westly, *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, Second Edition, Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1989, 132 & 133.

45. Scott and Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News Content of the National Broadcast Networks, 1972-1987," 408.

46. Richard Campbell, "Don Hewitt's Durable Hour," *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 1993, 25.

47. *Ibid*, 27.

Issue Salience and the Third-Person Effect: Perceptions of Illegal Immigration in a Southwestern Region

By

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Paper presented to the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Mass Communication and Society Division, Chicago, August 1997.

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Abstract

Issue Salience and the Third-Person Effect: Perceptions of Illegal Immigration in a Southwestern Region

This study, based on a telephone survey of 626 Phoenix, Arizona, respondents, examined the relationship between the salience concept in agenda-setting and the third-person effect. The third-person effect predicts that people perceive media messages to exert a greater persuasive influence on other people than on themselves. The study's findings suggested that issue salience might magnify people's tendencies to perceive greater media influence on others than on themselves. The study also examined whether Latino respondents' ethnic-racial identification with the social problem of illegal immigration influenced their perceptions of media influence on themselves and on other people. Examination of the ethnically relevant problem of illegal immigration suggests that there may be ethnic differences that need to be explored in future research.

Issue Salience and the Third-Person Effect: Perceptions of Illegal Immigration in a Southwestern Region

The media's agenda-setting influence on the public's prominence or "salience" of social problems can be studied at both the level of the individual and at the macrolevel of the aggregate public (McCombs, 1981; McCombs & Bell, 1996).[1] The two levels also work in tandem. People may be aware of the media's agenda-setting influence on society, and this awareness may shape their own beliefs about issue salience as they coordinate their interpersonal relations, political discussions, and attentiveness to issues in the media. Further, by heightening shared awareness of social problems, the media may cause people to think more intensely about social problems and develop or strengthen beliefs about social problems (Niemi & Bartels, 1985; Rabinowitz, 1982).

This study combined the salience concept in agenda-setting with the "perceptual bias" component of the "third-person effect." The perceptual bias component predicts that people perceive the media to exert a greater persuasive influence on other people than on themselves (Davison, 1983; Lasorsa, 1992; Schoenbach & Becker, 1995).

A few studies indicate people's awareness of the media's agenda-setting influence on society. Atwater, Salwen and Anderson (1985) asked respondents to appraise the media's agenda of problems (i.e., the "perceived-media agenda") and reported that respondents' estimations closely paralleled actual media coverage, as measured by a content analysis of news coverage.

Agenda-setting researchers in Japan typically include a measure of "perceived issue salience," which involves "a respondent's perception of the salience of issues to a collectivity of other individuals" (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 48, see also Takeshita, 1993). As Dearing and Rogers wrote, this creative Japanese approach bears resemblance to the "spiral of silence" model, where the mass media "have a powerful impact on what individuals think that other people are thinking" (p. 49).

The Salience Concept

Agenda-setting researchers have traditionally conceived of the public's problem salience as top-of-the-mind prominence measured by some variation of the Gallup-poll type, open-ended question, asking respondents to identify the "most important problem" (or a few major problems). Critics claim that agenda-setting researchers ignore sources of public salience other than media coverage (Edelstein, 1993).

An extensive subset of agenda-setting research on issue "obtrusiveness" addresses this concern (Demers, Craff, Choi, & Pessin, 1989). Research on issue obtrusiveness indicates that social problems that obtrude -- or are perceived to obtrude -- into people's lives, those that people observe and experience, are less susceptible to the media's agenda-setting influence than nonobtrusive issues because direct experience overrides learning acquired through media coverage (Blood, 1980; Eyal, 1979; Tipton, Haney & Basehart, 1975; Winter, 1981; Zucker, 1978).

The perception of an issue's obtrusiveness, rather than actual obtrusiveness, is an important aspect that was ignored in much of the early research. As Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) stated: "[W]hat is an obtrusive issue to one person may not necessarily be obtrusive to another" (p. 806). By focusing on perceptions of issue obtrusiveness, researchers treat the obtrusiveness concept as a social-psychological variable grounded in person-perception rather than as a trait inherent in the issue.

Respondents' racial or ethnic identification with an issue represents a special case of issue obtrusiveness in which people perceive an issue related to their ethnic-racial group to obtrude into their lives. A few agenda-setting studies suggest that ethnic-racial identification might play some role in agenda-setting. Iyengar and Kinder (1987, pp. 47-53) found differential agenda-setting effects by race, reporting that minorities attributed greater importance to civil rights than White respondents. Cherry (1986) reported that African Americans held a different overall agenda of issue priorities than the White population. After reviewing the research on differential agenda-setting among some racial groups, Dearing and Rogers (1996) speculated that "[p]erhaps Hispanics have a unique agenda-setting process also, as do other segments of the national population" (p. 94). Wanta and Miller (1996), however, failed to find differential agenda-setting by race/ethnicity.

Perceptions of Others

The fact that the public is aware of the media's agenda-setting influence underscores the need to link people's perceptions of media influence to the agenda-setting approach. The general nature of issue salience makes it amenable to merger with other social effects concepts (McCombs & Weaver, 1985). The third-person effect is also amenable to merger with other communication effects approaches (Willnat, 1996).

The third-person effect takes a phenomenological approach grounded in person perception, in which people try to explain media effects on themselves and on other people (Davison, 1983; Gunther, 1991; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). The news media, by focusing like a beacon on a small set of problems, restrict the agenda of political discourse to a few problems and make other problems largely inconsequential at the societal level. It is likely that people think about and make attributions about the limited set of salient public issues that are the focus of media attention at any time. In addition, it is also likely that they perceive that other people are thinking about the same limited set of issues.

Some third-person effect researchers implicitly assume the significance of issue salience by examining topics thought to be involving to respondents (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Perloff, 1989; White, 1995). Mutz (1989), surveying Stanford University students, faculty, and staff perceptions of university divestment in South Africa, reported that "the tendency to perceive others as more influenced by mass media than oneself was most pronounced among those who considered the issue very important" (p. 18). Mason (1995), reporting evidence for a third-person effect with jurors evaluating hypothetical libelous scenarios, noted that the effect occurred in a context where the messages were "personally threatening or involving to respondents and thus likely to encourage the reference to particularly incompetent others when responding to questions about effects of messages on other people" (p. 617).

Perceptions of the opinions of racial groups are particularly susceptible to perceptual bias because people access their stereotypes of racial groups to estimate group opinions. O'Gorman (1975) found that White adults during 1968 reported a persistent tendency for Whites to perceive White support for racial segregation even though polls at the time were indicating striking public opinion shifts among Whites in favor of desegregation. This misperception, known as "pluralistic ignorance," fit the public stereotype about how "most Whites" think.

More specifically, Perloff, Neuendorf, Giles, Chang and Jeffres (1992) measured respondents' ethnicity in a third-person perception study of the controversial docudrama "Amerika," which portrayed a peaceful Soviet takeover of the United States. Although they were limited by small cell sizes, they found that "relevant ethnics" from Russian or Eastern European extraction in their representative sample of multi-ethnic Cleveland brought their ethnic background to bear in perceptions of the programs' effects on other viewers.

Beyond Simple Salience

The application of the third-person effect to agenda-setting means moving agenda-setting beyond simple salience. Building on the seminal research of McCombs and Shaw (1972), most early research held that the media tell the public what to *think about*, but stress that this consequence does not directly translate into attitudinal effects on what people *think*.[2] While McCombs and Shaw (1977) acknowledged some indirect, long-term linkage between the media's ability to provoke problem awareness with attitudinal and behavioral consequences, they viewed these higher-level effects as subsequent links along a "chain of effects" that are mediated by a host of moderating variables (p. 4).

A programmatic line of experimental research by Shanto Iyengar and his colleagues reports a close connection between problem salience and attitudes. Iyengar and his colleagues argue that the news media call attention to problem traits and candidate characteristics that people use to form valuative judgments (Iyengar & Kinder, 1986, 1987, 1991; Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Entman (1989) also contends that it is difficult to isolate the media's influence on salience from higher-level consequences:

> The problem with the agenda-setting position is that the distinction between "what to think" and "what to think

> about" is misleading. Nobody, no force, can ever successfully "tell people what to think." Short of sophisticated torture or "brainwashing," no form of communication can compel anything more than feigned obeisance. The way to control attitudes is to provide a partial selection of information for a person to think about, or process. The only means of influencing what people think is precisely to control what they think about (pp. 76-77).

As a result of the questions regarding issue salience and race and ethnicity, a representative telephone survey was conducted in a Southwestern metropolitan region. Respondents identified their "most important problem" facing the nation and evaluated this problem on several dimensions. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the national problem of illegal immigration. The issue of illegal immigration was selected because it is an especially prominent social problem in this region. This region also has a sizable Latino -- mostly Mexican American -- population likely to be ethnically involved with illegal immigration. The following hypotheses and research question were tested:

H1: Respondents will exhibit a perceptual bias with their self-selected problem.

H2: Respondents will exhibit a perceptual bias with illegal immigration.

H3: Respondents will perceive the news media to be more effective in influencing other people (i.e, public opinion) than themselves about their self-selected most important problem than with illegal immigration.

RQ: Latinos and non-Latinos will exhibit differences in perceptual biases regarding social problems?

Method

Adults (age 18 and older) in the greater Phoenix, Arizona, area were surveyed by telephone during weekday evenings in March 1995. Telephone numbers were randomly drawn from the most recent telephone directories. The last digit of each selected number was randomly changed. A total of 626 respondents were contacted. Three attempts were made to reach each number. The rate of completed interviews to valid contacts was 70%. A Spanish-language instrument was used by bilingual callers when needed. The sample was 86% White, 57% female, and 23% Latino.[3]

Salience was measured by asking respondents to identify the most important national problem: "What would you say is the most important problem currently facing the nation today?" The salient problem was compared to another problem presumed to be ego-involving to Latino respondents, illegal immigration.

The period of the early and mid-1990s was marked by a backlash against illegal immigration (Miller, 1994; Moore, 1993). When this survey was conducted, residents in the border state of California recently approved Proposition 187 severely restricting the rights of illegal immigrants to public education and social services. Other states, including Arizona, considered enacting anti-immigration legislation similar to "Prop 187." Before Prop 187, in 1988, Arizona voters approved Article 28 of the state constitution, regarded as the most restrictive English-only legislation in the country (Epstein, 1996).

Evidence suggests that Latinos might evaluate illegal immigration as a more salient problem than other ethnic/racial groups. Survey findings repeatedly indicate that Americans of Latino ancestry tend to be more supportive of immigration than other Americans, although they too feel uneasy with illegal immigration (Moore, 1993). Among White-ethnic Americans, support for immigration grows less supportive as respondents' own generational immigration status increases (i.e., current immigrants, first, second, third generation) (Moore, 1993).

To measure the direction and magnitude between respondents' assessments of media influence on themselves and on others (i.e., the perceptual bias), each respondent was asked to estimate media influence of his or her self-identified most salient problem on him or herself ("How influential have the news media been in influencing your personal opinion regarding [the problem])"? and on others ("How influential have the news media been influencing public opinion about [the problem])"? Respondents were asked parallel-phrased questions about "illegal immigration."[4] The responses to the questions were measured by 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from very influential (+2) to not influential (-2) with a "no difference" midpoint (zero).

Findings

Regarding the aggregate responses to the "most important problem" question, research indicates a tendency for the public agenda to be limited to about six or seven major problems (McCombs & Zhu, 1995). The five major problems that accounted for 96.5% of the responses were classified as (a) the economy (n= 242, 39.8%, which included the economy, taxes, tax reform, trade, equal pay, cost of living, jobs, unemployment); (b) crime (n= 182, 29.9%, which included crime, violent crime, and violence); (c) health and education (n= 81, 13.3%, which included health, education, AIDS and other diseases, state of the schools, health insurance; (d) social problems (n= 54, 8.9%, which included child abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, family values, family and community, teen pregnancy; and (e) racial problems (n= 28, 4.6%, which included, prejudice, discrimination, affirmative action, minorities, race relations). When the problem categories were broken down by Latinos and non-Latinos, the rankings were identical.[5]

Table 1 reports a 2-by-2 matrix with mean-level responses of the self and other questions by respondents' self-selected most important problem and illegal immigration. Cell values ranged from +2.0 (very influential) to -2.0 (not at all influential).

Table 1 goes about here

Turning to the first column on the left, the mean-level responses supported the first hypothesis that respondents will exhibit a perceptual bias with their self-selected, most important problem (Others= 0.42, Self= -0.22, p <.001). Turning to the other column, the findings supported the second hypothesis that respondents will exhibit a perceptual bias with illegal immigration (Others= 0.14, Self= -0.68, p <.001). With both problems, not only were the differences in the "self" and "other" questions significant in the predicted direction, but the mean values for self influence questions were negative and for others influence questions were positive.

The row values in Table 1 compared perceived differences in media influence of the most important (i.e., self-identified salient) problem and illegal immigration. As the third hypothesis (see the top row) predicted, people perceived the media to exert a greater influence on other people (i.e., public opinion) than themselves regarding their most important problem than with illegal immigration (p <.001). Although people perceived the media to exert a greater influence on public opinion than themselves regarding their most important problem than illegal immigration, the positive values in both cells suggest that people generally perceived the media to be effective in influencing *other people's opinions.*

As the fourth hypothesis predicted, people perceived the news media to be less effective in influencing their personal opinions of the most important problem than illegal immigration. Both mean values were negative ($p < .001$). Although people perceived the news media to be less effective in influencing their personal opinions of their most important problem than illegal immigration, the negative values in both cells suggest that people generally perceived the media as ineffective in influencing *their own opinions.*

We now turn to the research question that asked whether ethnic-racial identification contributes to perceptual bias. We begin by examining perceptions of illegal immigration because this issue was thought to have special relevance to Latino respondents. Table 2 reports Latinos and non-Latinos' evaluations of media influence of illegal immigration on self and others. The findings in the columns indicate that both Latinos and non-Latinos exhibited a perceptual bias with illegal immigration ($p < .001$). However, Latinos, more than non-Latinos, perceived the media to exert a greater influence about illegal immigration on other people. In fact, the almost zero mean value among non-Latinos indicated that non-Latinos perceived the media to exert no influence on other people (Latinos= 0.41; Non-Latinos= -0.01, $p < .001$). The reason for the perceptual bias was in perceptions on self, with both Latinos and non-Latinos perceiving the media to exert little influence on themselves (Latinos= -0.85; Non-Latinos= -0.66, $p < .05$).

Table 2 goes about here

A series of tables were run to further test the research question asking whether Latinos and non-Latinos exhibit differences in perceptual biases regarding other salient problems. Table 3 indicated that both Latinos and non-Latinos exhibited a perceptual bias with their most important problem ($p < .001$).

Table 3 goes about here

To further explore the research question, matrices with mean-level responses to the self and other questions were tested with the two most frequently mentioned problems: the economy (see Table 4) and crime (see Table 5). Further analyses with other questions would have resulted in small cell sizes for the Latino subsample (less than 30) and resulting unstable variances. Even with the economy and crime it is important to stress the analyses were performed with small sample sizes of Latinos.

Table 4 presents the findings for the economy. Both Latinos and non-Latinos displayed a perceptual bias. The row values yielded findings worth examination. The t-value in the top row indicated that non-Latinos reported a stronger influence on other people than Latinos, and Latinos yielded a negative mean value while non-Latinos yielded a positive value (Latinos= -0.47; Non-Latinos= 0.29, $p < .05$). The t-value in the bottom row indicated that Latinos believed that they were less susceptible to media influence about the economy on themselves than non-Latinos, although both mean values were negative (Latinos= -0.86; Non-Latinos= -0.6, $p < .05$).

Table 4 goes about here

Table 5 reports the findings for crime. Both Latinos and non-Latinos displayed perceptual biases. Interestingly, however, Latinos and non-Latinos viewed the media as effective (positive values in both bottom row cells) in influencing their personal opinions about crime. There were no significant differences in row values.

Table 5 goes about here

Conclusions

This study set out to determine whether an individual's perceived salience of a social problem influences his or her perceptions of media influence of that problem on him or herself and on other people. It also examined whether an individual's ethnic-racial identification with a social problem influences the individual's perceptions of media influence of that problem on him or herself and on other people. To this end, this study brought together the salience concept in agenda-setting research and the perceptual bias component in the third-person effect.

As hypothesized, respondents exhibited a perceptual bias with their most important (i.e., salient) problem. They also exhibited a perceptual bias with illegal immigration. Respondents perceived the media to exert a greater influence on other people (i.e., public opinion) than themselves regarding their most important problem. They also perceived the news media to be less effective in influencing themselves than other people regarding their most important problem. These findings support the perceptual bias component of the third-person effect and suggested that perceived issue salience contributes to magnifying the perceptual bias component.

Examination of the ethnically relevant problem of illegal immigration suggested that ethnic differences may contribute to perceptual bias. Latinos, more than non-Latinos, exhibited a tendency to estimate greater media influence on other people than themselves. Non-Latinos estimated minimal media influence of illegal immigration on themselves and no significant influence on other people. Thus, Non-Latinos were making their perceptual bias estimations largely from their perspective of perceived media influence on themselves while Latinos were making estimations both on themselves and on their perceptions of media influence on other people. Latinos' ethnic involvement with illegal immigration may have caused them to draw on both their self-perceptions and perceptions other people while non-Latinos drew only self-perceptions.

More research is needed elaborating the role of problem salience in people's perceptions of media influence on themselves and on other people. The findings here were limited because only one issue was compared to respondents' most salient problem. Studies are needed that have respondents evaluate their perceptual biases on an array of problems, including their most important problem, to better determine whether perceived salience offers insight to understanding perceptual bias.

FOOTNOTES

1. As McCombs (1981) wrote: "Agenda-setting can be described either in terms of *aggregate* data from a population or in terms of *individual* data from a population" (p. 123, original emphasis).

2. For a discussion and review of the thinks/thinks dichotomy in agenda-setting, see footnote 4 of chapter 4 in Entman (1989, p. 180).

3. Race and Latino ethnicity sum to more than 100% because race (White, African American and other) and Hispanicity ("Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent") were asked as separate questions. Latino respondents were asked their Latino ancestry. All but two were of Mexican or Central American heritage, groups likely to be ego-involved with illegal immigration. The survey had a 4% sampling error. These findings are within the known population parameters of Latinos (20%) and Whites (86.5%) in the region. Females (50.5%) were over-represented in the sample. United States Department of the Census (1990).

4. This use of parallel phrased "self" and "other" questions is a common design for assessing perceptual bias.

5. Two coders independently classified the responses into the categories. Intercoder reliability exceeded 89%.

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Table 1: Evaluations of Media Influence of the Salient Problem and Illegal Immigration on Self and Others

EVALUATION	Self-Selected (n = 589) *M*	*SD*	Immigration (n = 582) *M*	*SD*	t-value
How influential have the news media been influencing public opinion about [the problem]?	0.42	1.08	0.14	1.03	5.27***
How influential have the news media been in influencing your personal opinion regarding the [the problem]?	-0.22	1.13	-0.68	0.94	7.94***
t-value	13.03***		16.67***		

*** $p < .001$
Two-tailed test

Table 2: Latinos and Non-Latinos' Evaluations of Media Influence of the Illegal Immigration on Self and Others

	Latinos (n = 138)		Non-Latinos (n = 399)		
EVALUATION	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-value
How influential have the news media been influencing public opinion about illegal immigration?	0.41	1.10	-0.01	0.98	4.01***
How influential have the news media been in influencing your personal opinion regarding illegal immigration?	-0.85	1.00	-0.66	0.90	1.98*
t-value	8.87***		13.89***		

* $p < .05$
*** $p < .001$
Two-tailed test

Table 3: Latinos and Non-Latinos' Evaluations of Media Influence of the Salient Problem on Self and Others

EVALUATION	Latinos (n = 127) *M*	*SD*	Non-Latinos (n = 392) *M*	*SD*	t-value
How influential have the news media been influencing public opinion about [the problem?]	0.16	1.29	0.53	1.06	2.93**
How influential have the news media been in influencing your personal opinion regarding [the problem?]	-0.46	1.27	-0.12	1.11	2.77**
t-value	4.38***		12.32***		

** *p* < .01
*** *p* < .001
Two-tailed test

Table 4: Latinos and Non-Latinos' Evaluations of Media Influence of the Economy on Self and Others

	Latinos (n = 49)		Non-Latinos (n = 164)		
EVALUATION	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-value
How influential have the news media been influencing public opinion about the economy?+	-0.47	0.91	0.29	0.93	4.84***
How influential have the news media been in influencing your personal opinion about the economy?	-0.86	1.23	-0.36	0.97	2.60*
t-value	2.94*		8.73***		

* *p* (.05
*** *p* < .001
Two-tailed test

+ The word "economy" is reported in this table for convenience. In each questionnaire callers used the appropriate term later coded as economy (i.e., cost of living, unemployment, etc.).

Table 5: Latinos and Non-Latinos' Evaluations of Media Influence of Crime on Self and Others

	Latinos (n = 36)		Non-Latinos (n = 125)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	t-value
EVALUATION					
How influential have the news media been influencing public opinion about crime?	0.88	1.21	1.01	0.87	0.96
How influential have the news media been in influencing your personal opinion regarding crime?	0.44	1.08	0.50	1.15	0.29
t-value	11.50***		5.74***		

*** *p* < .001
Two-tailed test

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES: MEDIA ETHICS AND THE MOVEMENT TO MINIMIZING HARM

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Paper presented to the Mass Communication and Society Division,
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
annual meeting, Chicago, July 1997

Top Faculty Paper

Abstract

One recent change in the SPJ Code of Ethics emphasizes that journalists should consider minimizing harm to society. This emphasis follows more than a decade of thinking by educators who have called for teaching journalism students moral philosophy and moral reasoning decision-making models -- models that generally examine potential harm that surrounds newsroom decisions. This study, a quasi-experiment, examines pre-and post test results of 210 students in nine sections of a mass media ethics class taught over six different semesters. After taking the course, which emphasized moral reasoning, students were more likely to make decisions that minimized harm, while gaining certainty in their answers. Differences between news-editorial and public relations students are noted. Essays written by the students support the finding that education in moral reasoning can be effective in the development of student journalists and their sense of responsibility to society.

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES:
MEDIA ETHICS AND THE MOVEMENT TO MINIMIZING HARM

In the fall of 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists completed a two-year process and adopted a new Code of Ethics that added two concepts: accountability and minimizing harm (Geimann, 1996). This change is one of the most visible manifestations of a movement that encourages journalists to consider minimizing harm to sources, subjects, and colleagues.

Not so visible is what might be happening to future journalists, especially those in the growing number of free-standing media ethics courses. Such college courses have increased 56 percent between 1984 and 1992-93, according to the most recent report by Lambeth, Christians and Cole (1994). During that period, various authors of media ethics instruction articles have urged that educators design their courses by heavily depending upon the learning of moral philosophy and moral reasoning decision-making models--models that generally examine potential harm (e.g., Martin, 1988; Bivins 1990; Meyers, 1990; Black, 1991; Richardson, 1994; Day, 1997).

One interesting question arises: what happens when journalism students make news decisions after being exposed to such ethics instruction? The purpose of this paper is to explore news decisions by students before and after instruction in a media ethics course that included moral reasoning skills.

At issue is the relationship between practicing journalists and the public they serve. As SPJ President Steve Geimann (1996) wrote: The profession must send a message to society that says journalists are "responsible, professional and ethical" (p.13). For many journalists, the road to responsible and ethical behavior begins in the classroom.

Literature Review

Ethics Course Content. Fostering moral reasoning skills tops the list of media ethics course objectives reported by Lambeth, Christians, and Cole (1994). This is significant and reflects the years of encouragement from leaders of media ethics education, the increase in media ethics textbook availability, and the existence of workshops and seminars for journalism educators not previously trained in moral philosophy. In urging the use of development theorists Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, Elliott (1993a) wrote, "The teacher of ethics must focus students' attention on how decisions in ethical quandaries are made rather than concentrating on what the decision turns out to be." To accomplish this, she advises that teachers help students identify their structures of moral reasoning and that they encourage more sophisticated styles of moral reasoning.

Various authors have supported the idea that students should learn the process of ethical deliberation for subsequent application to practicing journalism (Martin, 1988; Bivins 1990; Meyers, 1990; Black 1991; Richardson, 1994; Day, 1997). Process models popularly in use, for example, the Potter Box method and the Situation Definition-Analysis-Decision (SAD) formula, heavily rely upon identification of harm that may be caused to all parties by an ultimate decision.

The Potter Box method suggested for journalists' use by Christians, Rotzoll and Fackler (1995) has the user define the situation, identify values of the parties, identify the ethical principle and identify various loyalties owed by the journalist and others. Similarly, the SAD formula suggested by Day (1997) would have the user define the situation by describing the facts, identifying principles and values and stating the ethical issue or question, and then proceed to analysis by weighing competing values, considering external factors, examining duties to various parties and discussing applicable ethical theories. The decision that follows would be defended on the basis of moral theory.

Bivins (1993) added to the repertoire of ethics instruction by suggesting a decision-making worksheet used in case analyses that reflects the approaches of Christians and Day but directs students toward succinct responses to case studies in written assignments. His worksheet asks directly, "Which options could cause harm to any claimant?"

Ultimately, of course, the student must rely upon moral philosophy in all these models. Utilitarianism, Judeo-Christian and Kantian deontology are the value systems most examined in media ethics courses (Lambeth, Christians, & Cole, 1994). Thus, at the very least, students are being exposed to the simple categories of Consequential and Nonconsequential and the philosophers who would pit "duty" with "minimization of harm."

Clearly, semester-long learning encourages students to go beyond traditional news values and mere instinct in determining what should be published. In the media ethics course, perhaps for the first time, the students are inundated with the requirement to consider duties to sources, subjects, colleagues, and society along with the duty to get the story.

There is a natural difference between the basic news writing class where students become familiar with general news criteria and the ethics class, described by Richardson (1994): In the ethics class the learning should focus on the stakeholders -- those involved in the story. He sums up well the general consensus in media ethics education: "The goal is to leave them with a sense that they figured out how to do the right thing..." (p. 116).

Research on students in ethics classes. The search for mass media before-course and after-course effects thus far is best represented by studies by Surlin (1987) and Black (1992). The Surlin study, replicated and expanded by Black, used Rokeach's terminal and instrumental values to measure changes as the result of a media ethics course. Surlin found that at the conclusion of the course students were more self-contented, more concerned with the welfare of others, more open-minded, less driven by personal gain and more independent. The Black study consisted of an experimental group of ethics classes with a control group of students from media research, history and public relations classes. That study found that the experimental group placed greater emphasis on inner harmony, intellectual and logical values pre- and post-test and experienced significant gains compared to the control group in the values of salvation, inner harmony, wisdom and being intellectual.

These studies using the Rokeach values do not address the question of news decisions, however, and, with the control group of non-ethics class students, they also raise the question of academic concentration differences. A mass media ethics course typically enrolls students from all concentrations in a journalism curriculum.

Turning to studies of students in other-than-news concentrations, the focus varies. Among introductory public relations students, Wakefield (1994) found that ethics theory and decision-making made a difference from students exposed to traditional education that centered solely on the reading of ethics' text chapters and study of a professional code.

The potential that public relations majors may offer a differing world view was indicated by Pratt and McLaughlin (1989) in a study of college-behavior ethical inclinations of public relations students who had at least one prior PR course. They suggested that understanding of the public relations function might have influenced a finding that these students reported themselves as more moral than other college students.

Two other applicable studies on non-news-focused journalism majors have compared advertising students and practitioners in their responses to professional scenarios (James, Pratt & Smith, 1994), and investigated ethical standards attitudes of public relations students, educators and Public Relations Society of America members (Newsom, Ramsey & Carrell, 1993). The James, Pratt and Smith study found that advertising students were significantly more likely than practitioners to apply deontology to decision making; the authors concluded that "ethical behaviors need to be nurtured early and often...not necessarily later by unenforceable codes" (p. 80). Similarly, the public relations students (who were presidents of PRSSA chapters) were found to "generally reflect more idealism than educators and professionals" (p. 40).

From the literature, it is clear that research in media ethics instruction has much more to tell educators not only in how to teach more effectively but in suggesting ways in which these future professionals might affect the relationship between the media and the social environment in which it exists.

Research Questions

The basic research questions to be answered in this paper are:

1) Is there an overall change in news decision making of students after exposure to a mass media ethics class, and, if so, is there a pattern to this change?

2) Is there a difference between the journalism majors who study news-editorial from those who study public relations as option concentrations?

3) Do students become more aware of minimizing harm in the context of making news decisions?

4) Is there a difference in effects between early years of the course and the latter semesters in which additional class time and additional moral reasoning framework tools were included?

Method

Sample

The subjects are 210 journalism majors (public relations and news editorial options) enrolled in nine sections of a media ethics class at a state university. The data collection began in the 1992-1993 academic year and continued through 1995-1996. The same instructor taught all the classes.

The class is required for all journalism majors. Prerequisites include completion of the basic news writing course and at least one additional news reporting class (for the news-editorial option) and at least one additional public relations writing class (for the public relations option) before enrollment. Most students have at least two additional advanced courses in their option. Nearly all the news-editorial students have completed a semester of work on the campus student newspaper. Students are encouraged by their advisers to take the course in their senior year. The ethics course serves as the department's writing proficiency course for the university, and all students must earn a grade of C- to be graduated.

Instrument

Students were given a one-page sheet that contained seven ethical scenarios, with each one followed by a series of questions (22 total) that could be answered yes, no, or no answer (See Appendix).

The original instrument in this study was published by the Greensboro (North Carolina) News and Record in July 1986. The published piece was adapted from a questionnaire developed by the American Society of Newspaper Editors with portions of it being used by the News and Record and other newspapers. The test challenges the reader to "be an editor" and decide what to publish.

Procedure

Each student completed the instrument during the first week of the semester and the questionnaires were collected by the instructor. During the last week of class, students retook the test. Afterward, they were given their original answers and asked to write an open-ended essay that reflected on their answers.

The instruments were represented as a class assignment. Students were not told they would be taking the questionnaire the second time. The open-ended essays, but not the instruments, were graded as an exercise and counted toward the class grade. Data collection was incidental to the role the instrument played as a teaching tool.

Design

This study is a quasi-experiment field study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The stimulus is the 16 weeks of instruction in media ethics. There are pre- and post-test measures.

The Stimulus (Course Content). Content in the mass media ethics course heavily relied upon the learning of moral reasoning and justification through moral philosophy. The text was Louis Day's "Ethics in Media Communication," which presents to the students the SAD formula. Since 1993, supplementing this general framework was the instructor's adaptation of the Bivins' (1993) worksheet used as instructions to write weekly one-page papers on cases from the Day text. Students also were instructed in Gert's Moral Rules (Elliott, 1993b) and the proposed "ethical news values" of Patterson and Wilkins (1991). Two additional weeks were devoted to discussion of the moral reasoning process.

Analysis and Variables. With 22 dependent variables, the first task was to simplify the data. But factor analysis did little to clarify the data set. And there are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

Instead each answer was analyzed for fitting into one of two categories: one representing the belief that publication served the public's need to know the truth; and the other representing the choice of minimizing harm to the subject or society.

The definition used in assigning the two categories comes from John Merrill's (1997) definitions of deontological and teleological ethics. "The 'tell the truth' deontologist," he wrote, "would be a full disclosure reporter, feeling an obligation to the public to 'tell it the way it is'" (p. 62). The category of minimizing harm, which requires looking at potential outcomes of publication, used Merrill's definition that teleological journalists "do what they feel will best serve society. Or their communities. Or their newspapers. Or themselves. They do what they feel will bring the greatest happiness or benefit to the greatest number" (p. 66).

Two coders judged each question and easily reached 100% agreement in fitting each question into one of two categories: Truth and No Harm. By agreement, six questions were eliminated for not fitting the categories. This left 16 variables of interest. From those variables, a series of indexes were compiled based on each subject's answers at Time 1 and Time 2, creating the following variables:

UNCERTAIN1: At Time 1, students who answered "no answer" received one point for each question. The mean score was 1.49. The distribution was skewed left, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability score was .55.

UNCERTAIN2: At Time 2, students who answered "no answer" received one point for each question. The mean score was 1.05. The distribution was skewed left, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability score was .58.

NOHARM1: students who chose minimizing harm at Time 1 received one point for each question. The mean score was 6.62 . The distribution was normal, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability score was .55.

NOHARM2: students who chose minimizing harm at Time 2 received one point for each question. The mean score was 7.12. The distribution was normal, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability score was .58.

Results

Quantitative Results

Uncertainty. All 16 questions showed a decline in the number of students who were uncertain at Time 2 when compared with pretest scores (See Table 1). At Time 1, the greatest uncertainty focused on two questions: nearly 22% of the students did not know whether to print a story about a white collar crime when publication before the arrest would harm the criminal's wife who was critically ill in the hospital (at Time 2, 13% were still uncertain); and about 17% percent of the students were unsure whether to release embargoed information that could affect the outcome of an election (at Time 2, 8% were still uncertain).

Nearly 42% of the students did not answer two or more questions (mean 1.49) at the first measure. After taking the course, only 25% did not answer two or more questions (mean 1.05). A T-Test showed this to be a significant difference ($p<.0001$; see Table 2).

Minimizing harm. The mean score for minimizing harm at Time 1 was 6.6 answers. At Time 2, this mean score had increased to 7.1 answers, a significant difference ($p<.001$; see Table 3).

News Editorial vs. Public Relations Students. In trying to understand who changed their answers, the subjects were divided by option: public relations or news-editorial. At Time 1, news editorial students (mean = 5.94) were less likely ($p < .05$) than public relations students (mean 6.85) to make a decision that minimized harm. But that difference (news-editorial mean = 7.15; public relations mean = 7.11; $p > .90$) disappeared at Time 2. (See Table 4). The question about the businessman who made a mistake as a youth best typifies this movement. At Time 1, the news-editorial and public relations students disagreed about publication, 17% to 7% in favor and 13% to 6% uncertain. At Time 2, the percentages have changed to 9% vs. 5% in favor.

Of the 16 questions, the news editorial students moved toward minimizing harm on 12 questions at Time 2 when compared with Time 1. The public relations students moved toward minimizing harm on 6 questions. The most interesting difference between the groups at Time 2 was based on a question that dealt with a white-collar criminal whose wife was in the hospital and might die if the story were published. There was a decrease at Time 2 (42% vs. 21%) in news editorial students who decided that they should not publish the story, while there was a slight increase

(30% vs. 34%) in public relations students who thought the story should not be published.

On two questions of interest, the pattern was different. The public relations students and news editorial students disagreed about publishing the photo of the woman killed by her former boyfriend. But in this case, both groups of students became more certain and moved toward publication and truth, while the news-editorial students were much more likely to support publication at Time 2, 31% vs. 18% in favor.

Interestingly, both groups moved toward truth and publication when more students at Time 2 decided that the embargoed information should be released ahead of time to reveal information that might affect an election.

Course effect. Because the instructor changed teaching methods, analysis was conducted to see whether the change might increase the willingness of students to minimize harm.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine the effect.[1] An independent variable, MORAL, was dummy coded with 1 indicating those students who had received extra teaching in moral philosophy. Control variables that might explain learning (GENDER, COURSE GRADE, and OPTION) also were entered into the equation.

Results showed that after the control variables were entered, the emphasis on moral philosophy increased the r-squared from 34.7% to 35.7% (See Table 5). This is an impressive contribution from the MORAL variable ($p<.05$) considering that the control variables and the Time 1 dependent variable explained such a large proportion of the variance at Time 2.

Qualitative Results

To provide further explanation of the quantitative results, the students' final course essays were examined to determine whether they had recognized and articulated references to certainty, truth, and minimizing harm variables. (The directions for the final paper did not ask them to comment on these categories but to identify and discuss any change or similarity patterns in their answers of the two versions.) Their own words proved to be rich.

Certainty. Overall, students were quite clear that they were better able to make a news decision -- and back up that decision.

Students Who Made An Initial Decision. One student who had filled out the first questionnaire with what "just felt right" said that her second set of answers still "felt right" but "this time around, I didn't guess, I knew." Another noted that he was "always concerned that my decision would be different from the rest of the class" but ultimately "knew that even if no one agreed with me that I would be able to defend my decisions." Another noted that her ability "to be rational and logical" and "be patient about making these decisions" had improved "even though my beliefs have not changed." And one student wrote that "although the decision I rendered is the same as the one from the first time through, I can now support my decisions."

Defending their decisions was an important development to many of the students. One student who wrote that "every answer was the same" went on to note, "The margins of the paper, however, were different." At the beginning of the semester, he wrote, "the margins were bare;" at semester's end, "the margins were filled with small notes, as if I thought I had to justify my answers with more than checks in small boxes."

This weight of nuances was apparent with other students. One noted that the first time "all the answers appeared to be clear cut" and that "those who struggled...must be immoral people." The second time, she wrote, "it took me a lot longer," attributing this to thinking about "the consequences" and her "duties." Another admitted to having spent time dealing with complexity by stating, "I walked into the class thinking that my common sense and objectivity would lead me though the material I would be presented with over the course of the semester. I was pleasantly surprised."

Students generally come to the media ethics class with a background predominately in skills courses, even though ethics is normally addressed in some fashion. One student emphasized this difference: "There were times in the beginning of this class that I forsaked (sic) ethics for journalism clichés like 'reporting the whole story for the public's right to know' and 'public figures must give up their right to privacy.' These staples in journalism stifled my ability to make ethically sound decisions in the beginning."

Students Who First Gave "No Answer." Students who had checked the box "no answer" the first time around were quick to point this out in their essays. "When I did the first survey I had no idea what decisions to make," said one. And another said: "The marking of the 'No Answer' was my way of saying that I could not decide, which as an editor would not be acceptable." One addressed her change in this way: "I was unsure of how to answer...this led to my taking the easy way out and simply checking off the 'No Answer' boxes. The second time around I took a very strong Judeo-Christian attitude toward the dilemma." Another, who "originally left six questions" unanswered, noted he decided to take "extra time" the second time around.

Addressing confidence directly, one student wrote that her analysis of her first questionnaire "identifies an inability to make a confident decision" and that her inability to choose an answer "showed that I had no understanding of my duty as a journalist."

Truth. The struggle to adhere to truth-telling was addressed succinctly by one student: "Every decision I made seemed to be based on how much of the truth I wanted to reveal."

For a number of students, the struggle moved them from initial hesitancy to publish toward disclosure. "The first time I answered this question...I didn't think it was ethical to break a promise. The second time...I barely paused for a second...promise or not, I have a social responsibility as a moral agent to report the news truthfully," wrote one. And another reported her decision to report the rape of a public official because of its pertinence to a pending public policy change in this way, "I believe that a reporter has the duty to report the facts, no matter how damaging...it was something that readers should know." Another described a change in initial withholding: "When I was first faced with this issue...I would wait to run the story until I had an opportunity to talk with the hospital's doctors. A few months later and a major change in my beliefs was apparent...based on Kant's duty-based theory, I would immediately run the story."

A case in which a political candidate makes racist remarks off the record drew the rationale of "protecting the voters" by one student advocating a duty-based approach to truth outweighing keeping a promise. On another case in which politics and confidentiality was involved, a student initially did not break the confidentiality but later would, stated, "Now I can see that my true reasons came mostly from a fear of making waves for myself...I believe that a journalist has a duty to report something this significant to the public and I would feel ethically obliged to do so."

The publication of a photograph of a murder victim's children crying over their mother's body drew a parallel for one student to the Oklahoma City bombing-fireman with burned baby photograph publication. "Not printing all of the pictures does not change the horror of what happened. It does not minimize the harm to the weakest parties...Showing the world what happened as graphically as possible has more impact," she wrote.

And one student who struggled with a hesitancy to reveal information when harm would be caused concluded, "At the culmination of this course it has become apparent that I need to consider Kant's categorical imperative more seriously."

Minimizing Harm. The vast amount of space that students devoted to describing efforts to minimize harm mirrored the power of the quantitative results of change. Because the answer changes were most prominent from news-editorial students, their comments are most pertinent here.

The news-editorial students seemed to be particularly harsh on their early decisions to publish. "Early in the semester I chose answers that were insensitive to the grief of others," wrote one. Another: "Yes, I was willing to identify the victim and her children with names and addresses, use the photograph of them and get as much information as possible on the woman and her relationship with the suspect and publish it. What was I thinking?"

The photograph publication bothered another student who cited "harm to unsuspecting readers" as well as harm to the children and surviving family as reasons not to publish.

In noting that his first version responses "tended to favor publishing a story regardless of the consequence," one student wrote, "A twisted sense of journalism told me to disassociate the news story from the real, human event...In the first version, the decisions were made according to a few limited criteria such as news worthiness, interest, impact." In the second version, he wrote, "the responses seem to have been made with regard to the consequences...also specific intent to minimize harm."

For one student compassion was the important concept: "The question is not, 'have I or will I hurt someone.' The question is, 'Have I done my best to be honest and compassionate'.... I withhold information out of compassion [in one case scenario] and compassion says that I deliver the story [in another case] in a way that causes the least amount of pain to the family."

Another deferred to Gert's "loss of freedom and loss of pleasure" in a decision to withhold information from a profile of a university donor.

But, for one student, a move to minimizing harm perhaps provided longer-term life consideration. "I used to think like a libertarian; people are rational, government [should have] hands off, free expression and so on," he wrote. "Now I'm a little bit more aware of the fact that everyone isn't capable of reasoning and that there is a duty not only to serve the truth but also society, my community, my colleagues and myself."

Discussion

Summary

Instruction in media ethics made a difference to many of the students. The quantitative and qualitative results complement each other and provide a picture of students using course material to reach a moral decision.

The primary research question was, is there an overall change in news decision making of students after exposure to a mass media ethics class, and, if so, is there a pattern to this change. Clearly, students had a deeper understanding of how to make a decision, and the practice of minimizing harm was a consideration in their decision making at the end of the course. Pre- and post- test scores support the pattern of change toward less harm. And students, with their own words, explained the moral reasoning they used in considering their professional duties and their obligations to society. Certainty in decision making was translated by the students into the concept of being able to defend their choices.

The study also considered whether there is a difference between the journalism majors who study news-editorial and those who study public relations as option concentrations. The results suggest that news-editorial students enter an ethics class more uncertain when faced with an ethical quandary, and that public relations students were more likely to make decisons toward minimizing harm. After taking an ethics course that emphasizes moral philosophy, the differences disappear: There is an overall increase in the willingness of news-editorial students to make a decision and those decisions were more likely to minimize harm.

As a group, the students in this study became more aware of minimizing harm in the context of making news decisions. And when additional class time and additional moral reasoning teaching materials were included in the course, there was a clear correlation, even with stringent controls, with students' choosing to minimize harm.

Limitations

As with most experiments and field studies, the external validity of the results is limited by the characteristics of the sample: students enrolled in a course at a certain time. There may be characteristics of the students in this study that make the findings unique to this convenience sample. Likewise, Campbell and Cook (1979) have identified various threats to the internal validity of the results. Four issues are of particular concern in this study: 1) a semester-long course increases the likelihood that various extraneous factors outside the classroom might affect the results; 2) memory of the pre-test may influence the results of the post-test; 3) the expectations of the instructor/experimenter may influence the results; and 4) the lack of control group may affect interpretation of the results.

In considering the above issues of external and internal validity, the following conditions should be considered. There is nothing in the sample of students to suggest that they would be different from students at any other university, but it is certainly possible that the faculty and environment may have created conditions and attitudes that would not be an issue elsewhere.

But certain design features mitigate some of the threats to validity. The students in this study were enrolled in nine sections of the course during six semesters. Such variation over time makes it less likely that outside factors would have caused the consistent effects found in this study. Further, while the time between post-test and pre-test may be troublesome, time also allows for decay of students' memories of their answers on the pre-test. This "lack of memory" is supported by various comments on student essays that noted a vague remembrance of the scenarios, but no memory for the answers selected.

The issues of instructor expectations and absence of a control group also must be considered carefully. It should be noted that the instructor's teaching goals required direct influence on students and such influence was the point of this study. In this type of field experiment, there is no manipulation of the method. Instead the very goal of the study is to find out whether there is an instructor effect. Under these conditions, the subjects are their own controls in a with-in subjects design.[2]

Of course, there may be some characteristic of the teacher that makes her more effective or influences students in a way that was unintended. For example, students' believing their grade might be affected could answer questions in a way designed to please the instructor. But the qualitative results found in the student essays suggest instead that students have learned moral reasoning, which supports the quantitative findings reported in this study. The consistency of results presented in this study increases the validity of the conclusions.

Further, the validity of the results is enhanced by the naturalness of the field experiment. There is no laboratory to create unnatural attention to the tasks, and there is no manipulation for students to see through.

Finally, the last limitation of importance is the nature of the scenarios and the questions. Each question forced an answer, and students were not allowed to find creative solutions to the problems. The scenarios also were limited by their original design; they were not intended for an academic study.

Conclusion

It would be disheartening if the teaching of ethics did not produce effects in student journalists. The results presented here support the idea that an ethics course can be effective in and important to the development of the student journalist. Without training in moral reasoning, the student journalist seems to use intuition in reaching a decision. And it appears that the lack of training left some students, especially news-editorial students, unwilling to make a decision.

But there are important questions this study does not answer: why are news-editorial students unwilling to make decisions at the beginning of the course?

Perhaps students attracted to the news-editorial option have different personalities. But if that were the case, why does one ethics class change their minds so strongly in one direction? Instead, it seems reasonable to assume that the typical course content in a news-editorial option creates a sense of duty to the truth. There is evidence that the news-editorial students who changed from "no answer" to "don't publish" used ethical decision making to resolve a conflict between their deeply held values and the recent values they learned in their reporting classes and by working on the student newspaper.

There is much anecdotal evidence to support the theory that news-editorial students are socialized to be tough, to seek the truth, to publish what they know. It's easy to find a dominate news culture in education that emphasizes conflict, impact and the public's right to know.

Journalism teachers who earned their credentials working in the industry are likely to spread the values that dominated much of their careers; and there is probably no greater bedrock value among practicing journalists than the First Amendment and the corollary public's right to know. Odes to truth and accuracy fill journalism textbooks. As one popular journalism text (Mencher, 1997) explains, reporters are persistent in getting the truth, they hate lies and cover-ups, and they are willing to accept facts that contradict their beliefs.

Of course, the public often views the truth with disdain. The recent ABC-Food Lion court decision underlines this conflict between the public's desire for truth and its sensitivity to harm. Recent cover stories in the Columbia Journalism Review (Baker, March/April 1997), American Journalism Review (Gunther, March 1997) and Quill (Andron, March, 1997; Seigenthaler & Hudson, March, 1997) all ask the same question: how can the public condemn the messenger and yet feel sympathy for a company that was adulterating food?

When the SPJ changed its code of ethics to emphasize the role of minimizing harm, it validated an ethical code that many editors in small towns long knew. Readers are disappointed and offended when journalists hurt people, especially when the harm is perceived as needless and the people hurt are their neighbors.

The results of this study suggest that college ethics courses can undo the socialization that bends fledgling journalists toward the publish-at-all-costs ethic. But what happens when graduates take to the newsrooms, where the culture may still reward the truthful who seldom consider the consequences? Future studies might consider what students believe about ethics as they enter the newsroom and what they believe years later.

The concept of minimizing harm, although it had not yet been codified, was highlighted in the SPJ's own ethics handbook through two editions (Black, Steele & Barney, 1993, 1995). The book's "guiding principles" ask the journalist to be compassionate for those affected by the journalist's actions and to treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings who deserve respect (1995, p. 17). Although the handbook was not a specific reference for students in this study, the students reflect this concept in quantitative and qualitative measures. The words "compassion," "sensitivity" and "respect" are used both by students following the ethics course and in the new SPJ Code. Moral reasoning appears to lead both students and professionals to that journalistic place in society that Jay Black (1996, p. 25) describes: "Ethical and excellent journalism ... occurs when we seek out and tell the most truth we can, while causing the least amount of harm."

ENDNOTES

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[1] The researchers used a common method (e.g. Hsiao, 1986) of entering the Time 1 dependent variable, in this case NOHARM1, as a control variable in the regression equation. This technique allows for a causal inference.

[2] Indeed, it might even be unethical to establish a control group in an ethics course in which the students did not receive training in moral philosophy. To deny such training to students would certainly cause harm. The instructor's expectations in the course were that students would learn how to think, following the previous suggestion (Elliot, 1993a) that students need to learn how decisions in ethical quandaries are made rather than concentrating on what the decision turns out to be. As such, the instructor throughout the semesters never told students what her ethical position was or might be concerning various problems that would be discussed in class. The focus was on process, not outcome.

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APPENDIX

Scenarios

Note: After each case, a series of questions are asked. Responses to each question are either Yes, No, No Answer. The original instrument in this study was published by the Greensboro (North Carolina) News and Record in July 1986. The published piece was adapted from a questionnaire developed by the American Society of Newspaper Editors with portions of it being used by the News and Record and other newspapers. *Questions in italics were eliminated from the data analysis.*

Case 1

A woman county commissioner is raped. A conservative and antifeminist, she has blocked the expenditure of funds for a rape crisis center at the local hospital. This has been a much-publicized local controversy for the past six months. But now she tells you that she plans to rethink her position on the crisis center. She also makes clear the deep personal trauma she is suffering as a result of the assault and asks that you not say she was raped.

- Do you go ahead with the full story, including her change of mind, recognizing that the shift is a significant public policy development?
- Do you refer to the attack simply as an assault but report that the convalescing board member is rethinking her position on the crisis center, thus suggesting the nature of the attack?
- Do you report the assault and say nothing about the rape now, but decide that when she actually votes for the rape crisis center you will report the reasons for her change of mind whether or not she wants to talk about it?

Case 2

A mayor is a hard-liner on crime. He has made drug enforcement a major issue. You learn that his 19-year-old son, who lives at home and attends junior college, has been arrested for possession of a small quantity of marijuana, a misdemeanor if convicted.

- Would you run the story on his arrest?
- Would you run the story if the arrest were for selling a pound of marijuana?
- Would you run the story if the arrest were for using cocaine?
- Would you run the story if the arrest were for selling cocaine?

Case 3

A prominent businessman identified with United Way and many other charitable causes is discovered to have embezzled $25,000 from one of the charities he heads. There is no question about his guilt, although charges have not yet been filed. The story is yours alone. When your reporter contacts him for comment, the man says there are extenuating circumstances he cannot go into and that he will make full restitution if given a chance. He pleads that no story be written, saying his wife suffered a serious heart attack, is in critical condition in the hospital and he fears that public disclosure of what he has done would kill her.

- Would you run the story?

- *Would you wait until you had an opportunity to talk with the hospital's doctors and are confident the woman is out of immediate danger, then run the story?*
- *Would you give him time to make restitution and, if this is done, write nothing?*

Case 4

A businessman donated $5 million to UNC to expand Kenan Stadium. Checking his background, you learn the man was arrested at age 18 for armed robbery and avoided prison only by volunteering for military duty in World War II. His record, as far as you can discover, has been spotless since. He refuses to talk about the incident, says he has never even told his closest friends and threatens to withdraw the contribution to the university if you print the story. UNC officials are shocked and urge that you write nothing.

- Do you print the information on the arrest as an element in an overall profile of the man and who he is?
- *Do you take the position that the information is not relevant and discard it?*

Case 5

A man wanted for armed robbery and with a long list of prior convictions for assault and robbery is trapped by police at the house of his former girlfriend. He takes the woman and her two children hostage, forces them into his car and makes a dash for freedom. He is chased by police, finally stopped at a roadblock. Before he surrenders to police, he shoots and kills the woman. Your photographer is at the scene and takes a series of photographs, including one of the murder victim in the car with the children crying over her body. He also has shots of the man being handcuffed by police.

- Do you fully identify the woman victim and her children with names, addresses?
- Do you use the photograph of the victim and the children?
- Do you use the photograph of the man being arrested?
- Do you publish the list of the suspect's prior convictions in the story about the car chase and murder?
- Would you get as much information on the woman and her relationship with the suspect as possible and publish it?

Case 6

You are covering a presidential candidate. He is known to use various code phrases for going off the record. He uses one of those phrases before going into a long description of his campaign with you and other reporters. In the course of the description he uses racial slurs that you believe accurately represent the candidate's thinking. His racial attitudes have not been reported.

- Do you quote his racial references?
- *Do you wait in the hope that you can get him on the record?*
- *Do you wait even though the campaign is drawing to a close?*

Case 7

You and your staff have been working on a special edition that will appear after a presidential election, a retrospective, a summary. You have been given interviews by the competing major party candidates and their staffs on condition that the information you receive is embargoed until the election is over. Some of the information is political dynamite. One item shows the candidate to be highly in favor of a position he is denying during the campaign. The issue could be pivotal.

- Do you keep the information confidential?
- *If you keep it confidential do you, in the promotion for the special edition, highlight what you knew and didn't publish?*

Table 1

Percentage of each answer by time, group, case, and question
(N= Group, 210; News, 52; PR, 158)

CASE 1: Rape changes official's policy

•*Do you go ahead with the full story, including her change of mind, recognizing that the shift is a significant public policy development?*

	Time 1				Time 2		
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	33.8	56.7	9.5		34.3	59.5	6.2
News	32.7	55.8	11.5		38.5	55.8	5.8
PR	34.2	57	8.9		32.9	60.8	6.3

•*Do you refer to the attack simply as an assault but report that the convalescing board member is rethinking her position on the crisis center, thus suggesting the nature of the attack?*

	Time 1				Time 2		
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	43.8	46.2	10.0		46.7	50.0	3.3
News	38.5	51.9	9.6	&	26.9	69.2	3.8
PR	45.6	44.3	10.1	&	53.2	43.7	3.2

•*Do you report the assault and say nothing about the rape now, but decide that when she actually votes for the rape crisis center you will report the reasons for her change of mind whether or not she wants to talk about it?*

	Time 1				Time 2		
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	7.6	76.7	15.7		11.9	79.5	8.1
News	11.5	73.1	15.4		11.5	86.5	1.9
PR	6.3	77.8	15,8		12.0	77.2	10.8

CASE 2: Mayor's son, 19, arrested with small amount of marijuana.

•*Would you run the story on his arrest?*

	Time 1				Time 2		
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	51.9	41.4	6.7	*	43.3	54.8	1.9
News	55.8	32.7	11.5		46.2	50.0	3.8
PR	50.6	44.3	5.1	*	42.4	56.3	1.3

•*Would you run the story if the arrest were for selling a pound of marijuana?*

	Time 1				Time 2		
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	91.0	4.8	4.3	*	87.6	11.0	1.4
News	84.6	5.8	9.6		80.8	17.3	1.9
PR	93.0	4.4	2.5		89.9	8.9	1.3

* significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2
+ significant difference between groups Time 1 & significant difference Time 2

Table 1 cont.

•*Would you run the story if the arrest were for using cocaine?*

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	67.6	28.1	4.3		65.2	32.4	2.4
News	67.3	21.2	11.5	+	67.3	28.8	3.8
PR	67.7	30.4	1.9	+	64.6	33.5	1.9

•*Would you run the story if the arrest were for selling cocaine?*

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	95.7	1.9	2.4		95.7	3.3	1.0
News	92.3	1.9	5.8		90.4	7.7	1.9
PR	96.8	1.9	1.3		97.5	1.9	0.6

Case 3: Embezzlement and sick spouse

•*Would you run the story?*

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	44.8	33.3	21.9	*	56.2	30.6	13.3
News	36.5	42.3	21.2	*	63.5	21.2	15.4
PR	47.5	30.4	22.2		53.8	33.5	12.7

Case 4: Businessman who made one mistake as youth

•*Do you print the information on the arrest as an element in an overall profile of the man and who he is?*

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	9.5	82.9	7.6	*	6.2	91.4	2.4
News	17.3	69.2	13.5	+ *	9.6	88.5	1.9
PR	7.0	87.3	5.7	+	5.1	92.4	2.5

Case 5: Robber kills hostage/former girlfriend

•*Do you fully identify the woman victim and her children with names, addresses?*

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	14.8	78.6	6.7		15.7	81.9	2.4
News	23.1	65.4	11.5	+	21.2	75.0	3.8
PR	12.0	82.9	5.1	+	13.9	84.2	1.9

* significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2

+ significant difference between groups Time 1 & significant difference Time 2

Table 1 cont.

•Do you use the photograph of the victim and the children?

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	13.3	77.6	8.6		21.0	75.7	3.3
News	23.1	61.5	15.4	+ *	30.8	67.3	1.9
PR	10.1	82.9	7.0	+	17.7	78.5	3.8

•Do you use the photograph of the man being arrested?

Time 1: yes no uncertain Time 2: yes no uncertain

		Time 1			Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain	Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	95.2	1.9	2.9	98.1	1.4	.5
News	94.2	0.0	5.8	94.2	3.8	1.9
PR	95.6	2.5	1.9	99.4	.6	0.0

•Do you publish the list of the suspect's prior convictions in the story about the car chase and murder?

		Time 1				Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain		Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	87.1	8.6	4.3		89.0	8.1	2.9
News	78.8	13.5	7.7	&	78.8	15.4	5.8
PR	89.9	7.0	3.2	&	92.4	5.7	1.9

•Would you get as much information on the woman and her relationship with the suspect as possible and publish it?

		Time 1			Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain	Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	47.1	37.6	15.2	51.9	38.6	9.5
News	61.5	26.9	11.5	50.0	40.4	9.6
PR	42.4	41.1	16.5	52.5	38.0	9.5

Case 6: Off record racial slurs by candidate

•Do you quote his racial references?

		Time 1			Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain	Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	45.7	42.9	11.4	44.3	49.0	6.7
News	55.8	28.8	15.4	53.8	40.4	5.8
PR	42.4	47.5	10.1	41.1	51.9	7.0

Case 7: Embargoed information cannot be released until after election

•Do you release the confidential information?

		Time 1			Time 2	
	Yes	No	Uncertain	Yes	No	Uncertain
Group	39.0	43.8	17.1	47.1	45.2	7.6
News	36.5	44.2	19.2	46.2	48.1	5.8
PR	39.9	43.7	16.5	47.5	44.3	8.2

* significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2

+ significant difference between groups Time 1 & significant difference Time 2

Table 2

Pre- to post-test change in subjects' mean scores for uncertainty
(n = 210)

Variables	Mean	SD	DF	p
Uncertain T1	1.49	1.70	209	< .0001
Uncertain T2	1.05	1.37		

Table 3

Pre- to post-test change in subjects' mean scores for minimizing harm
(n = 210)

Variables	Mean	SD	DF	p
No harm T1	6.63	2.15	209	< .001
No harm T2	7.12	2.29		

Table 4

Differences in mean scores for minimizing harm by group and time

Time 1 Minimizing harm

	Mean	SD*	n	p
Group				
News-editorial	5.94	2.48	52	< .02
PR	6.85	1.99	158	

* Standard Deviations were significantly different, F=1.56, p < .05; Separate variance estimate used to calculate probability, df=73.74.

Time 2 Minimizing harm

	Mean	SD	n	p
Group				
News-editorial	7.15	2.58	52	.92
PR	7.11	2.20	158	

Table 5

Effects of increased instruction in moral reasoning on decisions to minimize harm

Dependent variable	Independent measures	Standardized Beta	Regression coeffecient	Incremental R Squared	Model R Squared
No Harm T2					
	No Harm T1	.593***	.631		.326***
	Course Grade	.012	.014		
	News-Editorial	.11	.578		
	Gender (M)	.10	.485	.02*	.347***
	Moral Reasoning	.10*	.486	.01*	.357***

* p<.05 ***p<.001

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND PUBLIC DIALOGUES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS BEHAVIOR OF NEWSPAPER OMBUDSMEN

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A paper presented to the Mass Communications & Society Division at the 1997 annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, July 30-Aug. 2, 1997 in Chicago, Illinois.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND PUBLIC DIALOGUES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS BEHAVIOR OF NEWSPAPER OMBUDSMEN

Journalists and scholars have long debated whose interests a newspaper ombudsman serves when responding to public concerns about a newspaper's performance. Supporters say that by airing the public's concerns and criticizing a newspaper's behavior, ombudsmen may be a catalyst for changes in journalistic behavior.[1] Critics counter that ombudsmen are little more than a public relations gimmick that primarily serves the newspaper's interest.[2]

There is evidence that public relations-type activities are universal among ombudsmen.[3] But does this mean that the ombudsman's public relations activities serve the newspaper's interests to the exclusion of the public interest?

This is a study of the public relations behavior in the public columns of American newspaper ombudsmen. Although a column is just one way that ombudsmen interact with the public, it is one of the most visible of the ombudsman's duties and the activity most likely to reach the newspaper's readers.

Using the Grunig and Hunt theory of public relations roles,[4] we conducted a content analysis of ombudsmen columns in an effort to examine the public relations behavior of ombudsmen as revealed by their columns.

We found the dominant role to be a one-way form of communication, usually explaining the newspaper's behavior. Yet this often occurred in tandem with two-way forms of communication, which involved allowing the public to comment on the newspaper's performance.

We argue that the public relations dimension of ombudsmen behavior is more complex than has been shown in previous studies of ombudsman behavior. To varying degrees, the ombudsmen we studied allowed the public to publicly scrutinize the newspaper's performance. This facilitates a limited public dialogue about the newspaper's performance even if the ombudsman firmly controls the forum in which the dialogue occurs.

Background

The modern ombudsman movement began during a time when American newspapers were trying to be more responsive to public concerns about press performance.[5] In 1967, the late A.H. Raskin, then an assistant editorial page editor at The New York Times, proposed that newspapers create a department of internal criticism to be headed by an ombudsman.[6] The ombudsman would be a media critic who would scrutinize the fairness and adequacy of the newspaper's coverage and comment, and would have the authority to get something done about valid reader complaints.[7]

Shortly after Raskin's column appeared in The New York Times Magazine, the Louisville, Ky., Courier-Journal and Louisville Times appointed an ombudsman.[8]

The ombudsman concept dates to 1809 when the Swedish parliament created a "citizen's protector" who served as a check against unfair governmental administrative decisions. Swedish ombudsmen were impartial investigators who were officers of the legislature and had been granted political independence. Although they lacked the authority to alter administrative decisions, ombudsmen offered an inexpensive and swift means of handling appeals of administrative decisions.[9]

Swedish ombudsmen and newspaper ombudsmen are similar in that both solicit public comment and investigate complaints. Unlike Swedish ombudsmen, newspaper ombudsmen are employed by the organization whose behavior they are appointed to monitor. Newspaper ombudsmen generally lack the authority to seek redress on behalf of complainants. Their investigative authority tends to be proscribed and limited to spotlighting problems that management will, presumably, resolve.[10]

Since the Louisville newspapers appointed an ombudsman 30 years ago, researchers have examined the slow acceptance of the ombudsman concept by the newspaper industry,[11] how ombudsmen are viewed by the staff of the newspaper they serve,[12] an ombudsman's duties,[13] public reaction to newspapers that employ an ombudsman,[14] the influence of an ombudsman upon journalists' attitudes,[15] the role orientations of ombudsmen,[16] and the use of an ombudsman to manage disputes with readers.[17]

Ombudsmen are reluctant to describe their work as encompassing public relations activities.[18] Lou Gelfand, the reader representative of the Minneapolis Star Tribune once commented, "We are not PR people. We may come from management, but that [public relations] is not our job."[19]

However, Ettema and Glasser's study of the role orientations of ombudsmen concluded that an ombudsman's work is a model of contemporary public relations practice.[20] They wrote that ombudsmen are "discouraged by their superiors, their peers, or their own value system from explicitly acknowledging that role [public relations]."[21]

This reluctance probably stems from the fact that many journalists view public relations and its practitioners with disdain.[22] Journalists also tend to see themselves as superior to public relations practitioners.[23]

Public relations is an elusive term to define. Many definitions focus on tactics and techniques used by public relations practitioners. Contemporary public relations textbooks, however, emphasize public relations as a process involving planning, research, communication and evaluation.[24]

Historically, public relations practice involved one-way forms of communication, often using the mass media to disseminate messages about an organization to a general audience.[25] Increasingly, public relations practice involves two-way forms of communication with organizations soliciting public opinion and using the findings to create public relations programs.[26]

Modern public relations practice is considered to be the management of communication between an organization and the public, working toward the goal of mutual understanding.[27]

The Grunig and Hunt theory classifies public relations behavior into four models -- press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical.[28] The theory is built on concepts of synchronic (asymmetrical) and diachronic (symmetrical) communication.

Synchronic communication seeks to synchronize the public's behavior with an organization so the organization can behave as it desires without interference.[29]

Diachronic communication seeks mutually beneficial conditions for the public and the organization alike. This may involve changing an organization's behavior.[30]

The press agentry and public information models describe one-way forms of communication. Organizations practicing these models disseminate information to the public. The two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models describe two-way forms of communication. Organizations practicing these models exchange information with the public.[31]

Often associated with propaganda, press agentry is an advocacy form of communication in which truth is not essential. By contrast, public information involves truthful dissemination of information.[32] The public information model is sometimes described as "journalists in residence" because messages reflect such traditional journalistic values as objectivity, accuracy and easy readability.[33]

Practitioners of two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models rely on research of public attitudes to formulate public relations programs. The two-way asymmetrical model uses research data to develop messages most likely to persuade the public to behave as the organization wants.[34]

The two-way symmetrical model also uses research data to help formulate messages, but the organization's goal is to promote mutual understanding. An organization might change its behavior to bring that about.[35]

Press agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical are synchronic models because they leave an organization unchanged. The two-way symmetrical model is diachronic, seeking to adjust relationships between an organization and the public.[36]

Adapting the Grunig and Hunt theory to a study of newspaper ombudsmen poses some problems. Ombudsmen do not consider themselves to be public relations practitioners and operate under a different value system than practitioners. Messages created by public relations practitioners need the approval of an organization's management. However, ombudsmen create and disseminate messages without much direct management oversight.

This is not to say ombudsmen have complete independence. Many editors fear an ombudsman's public and private criticisms may create staff morale problems.[37] Therefore some newspapers have restricted the scope of the ombudsman's mandate to criticize, in some cases putting certain topics off limits.[38]

Ombudsmen who anger their newspaper's management may face harsh consequences.[39] A Canadian ombudsman was fired after refusing to apologize for his criticism of his newspaper's news judgment.[40] An ombudsman at the St. Petersburg Times resigned rather than apologize for her criticism of how the paper assigned reporters to cover a race riot.[41]

Nonetheless, the Grunig and Hunt theory is a useful tool for studying how ombudsmen manage the communication between the public and their newspaper. We wanted to show in this study a sharper, more accurate picture of what ombudsmen do in their public columns from a public relations standpoint.

We also had a sense that the ombudsman's public relations function was more sophisticated and complex than that of the press agentry or public information stereotypes often attached to the term "public relations." Consequently, we believe the Grunig and Hunt theory provides an appropriate theoretical framework from which we can learn more about the public relations activities of ombudsmen as revealed in their columns.

Method

We examined the columns published in 1994 by ombudsmen who worked for daily newspapers in the United States. To determine if they had published columns in 1994, we contacted the 34 U.S. ombudsmen listed as members of the Organization of News Ombudsmen. We then obtained the columns of the 22 ombudsmen who published columns during the year.[42] Thus, we were able to conduct a census of ombudsman columns for a single year.

An ombudsman was defined as someone employed full time for the purpose of communicating with readers about the newspaper's performance. Not all newspapers use the title of ombudsman. Some ombudsmen hold such titles as reader representative, public editor or reader advocate. What makes them ombudsmen is that they all perform similar functions.

Each column was content-analyzed with the unit of analysis being the paragraph.[43] We chose the paragraph because of the complexity of behavior found in ombudsmen columns. Ombudsmen often write about more than one subject per column. The manner in which they respond to each subject or even their response to the same subject matter can vary. By focusing on the paragraph, we were better able to detect and categorize this variance.[44]

The content analysis was a two-step process.[45] We achieved an intercoder reliability of 98 percent based on Holsti's formula.[46] We first coded to identify paragraphs containing public relations behavior. Public relations was defined as seeking to facilitate communication between the newspaper and its constituencies for the purpose of furthering public understanding of the newspaper's behavior.[47]

This included reporting comments from readers, explanations of newspaper behavior, and announcements regarding new services or changes in existing services offered by the newspaper. Two types of behavior fell outside the realm of public relations: accountability and criticism.

Accountability was defined as the newspaper being obligated to explain or justify its behavior to such constituencies as readers or sources of information.[48] Accountability occurred when an ombudsman published the answer of someone at the newspaper in response to a reader comment or question about the paper's behavior. The response had to come from a person involved with or having supervisory authority over those involved with the behavior that triggered reader reaction.

We coded as public relations instances where newspaper managers or staff offered explanations through the ombudsman's column regarding the paper's behavior without having been prompted by a reader's request for accountability. We viewed these as seeking to further public understanding of the newspaper's conduct.

Criticism was defined as the informed, analytical evaluation and judgment of a newspaper's performance.[49] To be considered criticism, an ombudsman had to criticize his or her own newspaper. We encountered cases in which an ombudsman offered cogent, lucid and insightful analysis of the shortcomings of journalism generally. We coded this as public relations because it did not involve criticism of the ombudsman's newspaper but instead seemed designed to further public understanding of journalism and newspaper practices generally.

We excluded from this study all paragraphs containing solely accountability or criticism or a combination of the two. We included paragraphs that contained a combination of public relations and other behaviors. However, for this study, we considered only the part of the paragraph containing public relations behavior.

Each paragraph was read and coded to determine which model of the Grunig and Hunt theory it reflected. Press agentry was defined as one-way communication in which the ombudsman promoted an activity of the newspaper through use of hyperbole, exaggeration or self-promotion.[50]

Public information was defined as one-way communication in which the ombudsman provided a factual and objective, although usually favorable, message about the newspaper's behavior.[51]

The presence of reader comment differentiated press agentry and public information from the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models. We differentiated two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical by the degree to which the ombudsman maintained control of the public dialogue or exchange of views about the newspaper's performance.[52]

We considered an ombudsman to be engaging in two-way asymmetrical behavior when he or she summarized the views of one or more readers about the newspaper's performance. The key was the ombudsman's role in controlling the agenda and dialogue occurring in the column. When the ombudsman seemed in control of these, we coded the behavior as two-way asymmetrical.

When the ombudsman was more of an equal partner with readers in the dialogue, we coded the behavior as two-way symmetrical. Ombudsmen practicing this model allowed readers to speak in their own voice, often in their own words, about the newspaper's performance. The ombudsman was more of a conduit who facilitates public discussion of the newspaper's performance.

Admittedly, the limitations of this content analysis prevented us from observing the degree to which behavior we identified as two-way symmetrical may have led to the goal of mutual understanding or to an adjustment of relationships between the newspaper and the public. We argue that an ombudsman who allows the public to speak in its own voice, that is allowed to be a more equal participant in a public dialogue about the newspaper's performance, is more likely to arrive at the goal of mutual understanding and to consider changing its own behavior than an organization that controls the public dialogue and speaks on behalf of the public.

Results

The columns we studied were designed primarily to initiate and maintain a two-way exchange of information between the newspaper and the public, or to provide a one-way flow of information from the ombudsman to the public.

Table 1 Goes Here

Table 1 shows an overwhelming percentage of the paragraphs (84.7 percent) of the ombudsmen columns reflect public relations behavior. Seven of the 22 ombudsmen devoted more than 90 percent of the paragraphs in their columns to purely public relations behavior.

When the purely public relations behavior paragraphs are combined with paragraphs including public relations and other forms of behavior, the results show that 21 of the 22 ombudsmen devoted more than three-fourths of the paragraphs of their columns to behavior that was public relations-oriented in some form. Even when ombudsmen are criticizing their newspapers or responding to demands for accountability, they often accompany this with public relations behavior, usually an explanation of why the paper behaved as it did in a given situation.

Table 2 Goes Here

Table 2 shows that public information was the dominant public relations model practiced by the ombudsmen in their columns. More than three-quarters (79.4 percent) of the paragraphs analyzed reflected this function.

Ombudsmen at three newspapers -- The Washington Post, the Fort Wayne (Ind.) News-Sentinel and the Portland Oregonian -- devoted more than 90 percent of the paragraphs of their columns to the public information model. By contrast, ombudsmen at three newspapers -- the Rocky Mountain News (Denver), the Minneapolis Star Tribune and the Palm Beach (Fla.) Post devoted less than 60 percent of the paragraphs of their columns to the public information model.

Yet, at all 22 newspapers, the public information model accounted for more than half of the paragraphs written in ombudsmen columns. Thus, much of the time, ombudsmen provide their readers straightforward explanations and discussions of why newspapers behaved as they did in given situations.

Ombudsmen rarely practiced the press agentry model. A scant 0.2 percent of the paragraphs contained press agentry behavior. Twelve ombudsmen did not practice any press agentry and only one ombudsman, the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel, devoted more than 1 percent of the column's paragraphs to press agentry.

Of the two-way models of public relations behavior, two-way symmetrical was the most widely practiced, although it made up only 11.9 percent of the paragraphs analyzed. Ombudsmen at three newspapers -- the Amarillo (Texas) Globe-News, the Boston Globe and the Palm Beach Post -- devoted more than 20 percent of the paragraphs of their columns to the two-way symmetrical model.

The two-way asymmetrical function occurred in just 4 percent of the paragraphs analyzed. The Minneapolis Star Tribune ombudsman led the list, with 9.3 percent of his paragraphs reflecting this model. Ombudsmen at four newspapers -- the Courier-Journal in Louisville, Ky., the (Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union, the Boston Globe and the Minneapolis Star Tribune - devoted as much as 6 percent of their columns to the two-way asymmetric model.

The various combinations of functions, i.e. public information and two-way asymmetrical, accounted for less than 5 percent of the total paragraphs in the study, although two newspapers -- the Rocky Mountain News and the Minneapolis Star Tribune -- had more than 7 percent of the paragraphs reflecting both the public information/two-way asymmetrical models.

Ombudsmen at three newspapers -- the Orange County Register (Santa Ana, Calif.) the Rocky Mountain News and the Palm Beach Post -- wrote columns containing more than 8 percent of the total paragraphs for the public information/two-way asymmetrical models.

Table 3 Goes Here

The contrast between the one-way and two-way models is shown in Table 3. About 25 percent of the paragraphs involved solely one-way models of public relations communication, either in the form of press agentry, public information or a combination of the two models.

Yet nearly three-quarters of the paragraphs in the columns showed some degree of two-way communication, either as two-way asymmetrical, two-way symmetrical or a combination of both. It is important to note the presence of public information in many of the paragraphs reflecting two-way models of public relations communication.

We found no single column devoted entirely to two-way models of communication. This suggests that ombudsmen practice the two-way models of public relations behavior in tandem with the public information model. An ombudsman allows the public to "have its say" about the newspaper's performance, but follows that up with an explanation or commentary about the behavior in question. Such discussions seem designed to provide the newspaper's point of view

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rather than to engage in an extended give-and-take dialogue with the public.

The willingness of ombudsmen to involve the public in their columns was what most differentiated them. At two newspapers -- The Washington Post and the Fort Wayne News-Sentinel -- more than 90 percent of the paragraphs were solely one-way forms of communication, mostly the public information model. The public's voice was seldom directly heard in the ombudsman's columns.

The Washington Post's ombudsman engaged predominantly in commentaries about the challenges of journalism generally rather than attempting to answer specific reader inquiries. By contrast, the reader representative in Fort Wayne wrote a limited number of columns and all were designed to elicit public understanding of the newspaper's editorial decision-making process. It seems clear that these functions, important as they may be, constituted a more minor role in the work of the other 20 ombudsmen who write public columns.

At six newspapers -- the Orange County Register, Rocky Mountain News, Amarillo Globe-News, Boston Globe, Palm Beach Post and Minneapolis Star Tribune -- some form of two-way communication was found in at least 90 percent of the paragraphs. This suggests these ombudsmen are more committed to airing public comment about their papers' performance. These ombudsmen still perform the public information role much of the time, but do so in reaction to issues and disputes raised by readers.

At newspapers in the middle, the public's voice was heard in varying degrees. Typically, public comment was reported in some columns, but not all columns. These ombudsmen primarily disseminated information, yet at times allowed readers to air their grievances and comments.

Discussion

If allowing the public to speak out about a newspaper's performance is serving the public interest, then most ombudsmen do so more effectively than if they engaged in purely one-way forms of communication. In a majority of columns that we examined, the ombudsman served as a facilitator of a dialogue with readers about the newspaper's performance.

Eighteen of the 22 ombudsmen engaged in some form of dialogue with readers at least half of the time. Six of the 22 ombudsmen spent more than 90 percent of their columns engaged in some form of dialogue with the public.

These conclusions, though, come with an important caveat. By virtue of their position and due to the nature of how they write their columns, ombudsmen decide who gets to speak, how they will be allowed to speak and how much they are allowed to say.

We cannot determine by reading their columns what ombudsmen did not publish. In some instances, an ombudsman may have ducked, downplayed or ignored some particularly biting public criticisms of the newspaper's performance. Such criticisms may have been passed along internally to editors and reporters without any public comment by anyone at the newspaper.

It is also significant that the most frequent model of behavior that we found was public information. Ombudsmen are rarely modern-day P.T. Barnums beating the drums on their newspaper's behalf or disseminating information with little regard to its truthfulness.

Although ombudsmen are hardly Rodney Dangerfields who complain about their newspapers not getting any respect, ombudsmen do seem to believe the public misunderstands or is not adequately informed about why journalists behave as they do. Admittedly, this conclusion was not drawn from systematic study of ombudsmen attitudes toward the public but rather from our observation that ombudsmen explain a lot.

Many columns had a "Journalism 101" or "Newspaper 101" quality. As Tate concluded after reading some 800 ombudsman columns, "most [ombudsmen] are inclined to explain rather than examine and often the explanations amount to . . . we do it that way because that's the way we do it; it's our policy."[53]

We found ombudsmen devoting much of their columns to one-way practices of public relations, primarily disseminating truthful, although favorable, information about the newspaper's activities. Perhaps ombudsman believe that "if you the public knew what we knew you would have made the same decision."

This analysis cannot answer why ombudsmen favor one-way models or two-way models in a given situation. Perhaps the nature of the issues raised by readers may be a determinant of whether an ombudsman uses one-way or two-way models of communication. Researchers may want to examine this on two levels. First, the nature of the issue may determine which issues are addressed the columns and which are excluded.

Secondly, the nature of the issue may determine how the ombudsman chooses to address it within the column. Ombudsmen oriented toward one-way forms of communication may do most of the "talking" in discussions about certain controversial issues. But ombudsmen oriented toward two-way forms of communication may opt for allowing readers to define the issue and to comment on the newspaper's behavior.

A newspaper's corporate culture may help explain the behavior we observed. A corporate culture that encourages public discussion of the newspaper's performance might encourage an ombudsman to engage in two-way models of communication in response to reader complaints about the paper's performance. Corporate cultures that discourage public discussion of a paper's performance might promote more one-way model behavior.

In their seminal study of the role orientations of ombudsmen, Ettema and Glasser found the role of the ombudsman could not be unambiguously defined by ombudsmen themselves.

The researchers found that ombudsmen seemed capable of embracing conflicting role orientations, most notably rejecting the idea that ultimate loyalty to readers was the opposite of ultimate loyalty to the newspaper.[54]

Ettema and Glasser argued that the public relations function was related to a sense of newspaper loyalty and also to a sense of divided loyalty between readers and the newspaper.[55]

Part of the problem may be traditional conceptions of public relations. If public relations is defined as disseminating favorable information about a newspaper to the public, then all ombudsmen engage in this behavior a majority of the time.

But if public relations is seen as a process capable of involving two-way communication between the public and the newspaper in an attempt to establish a public dialogue about the paper's performance, then the ambiguity that Ettema and Glasser found becomes a bit more understandable.

Two-way forms of public relations behavior offer an ombudsman an opportunity to air criticism in a way that is, perhaps, less threatening to staff morale. Rather than the ombudsmen being the critic, the public is the critic. Yet we found this behavior often accompanied by explanations of the behavior criticized by readers. Professional orientations of ombudsmen cannot be overlooked as possible explanations of this relationship of one-way and two-way forms of behavior.

In short, two-way forms of public relations behavior may enable an ombudsman to promote the goals of criticism without having to be a critic. Ombudsmen may believe that allowing the public to speak on selected topics shows that the newspaper's willingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of public comment.

Future researchers might want to compare role orientations of ombudsmen and the degree to which they engage in two-way, as opposed to one-way forms, of public relations behavior. Ombudsmen who rate higher in reader loyalty might more often use two-way models of public relations behavior, particularly the two-way symmetrical model.

The ombudsman's public relations behavior is more complex than has previously been shown. We believe some forms of public relations behavior offer the potential to serve the public interest. Far from being the "flack" associated with the press agentry model of public relations, newspaper ombudsmen often use their public columns to maintain a dialogue with the public about the newspaper's behavior.

ENDNOTES

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Table 1

Paragraphs Containing Public Relations Behavior

City	Col	Para	PR	PR/Other
San Diego	45	995	81.1	87.7
Palm Beach	36	522	78.4	82.4
Denver	53	556	75.7	95.5
Boston	23	405	74.8	85.2
Fort Wayne	6	109	100	100
Hartford	23	443	96.8	98.4
Wilmington	22	710	95.0	95.6
Baltimore	6	105	94.3	100
Richmond	36	1,034	93.0	94.3
Jacksonville	48	1,244	91.6	95.4
St. Louis	47	1,417	90.8	92.5
Salt Lake City	50	990	88.6	90.6
Amarillo	92	2,495	86.8	88.1
Fort Worth	48	1,530	85.6	89.0
Norfolk	52	1,329	85.2	92.3
Sacramento	34	774	84.3	91.8
Washington	37	681	81.4	93.2
Fresno	48	1,007	81.2	83.3
Portland	42	912	81.1	90.4
Sinneapolis	46	1,040	73.8	80.6
Orange County	46	765	66.1	81.8
Louisville	5	109	66.0	74.3
Table	**845**	**19,172**	**84.7**	**89.9**

NOTE: Col. is number of columns published. Para. is total number of paragraphs. PR is percentage of paragraphs containing solely public relations behavior. PR/Other is percentage of paragraphs containing public relations and other forms of behavior.

Table 2

Paragraphs Coded by Public Relations Model (Expressed in Percentages by Public Information Function)

City	Para PR	PI	PA	2-A	2-S	PI-2A	PI-2S	2A-2S
Washington	634	98.9	0	0.3	0	0	0.8	0
Fort Wayne	109	96.3	2.8	0	0	0	0	0.9
Portland	825	90.9	0	1.3	6.6	0.7	0.3	0.2
Hartford	435	88.0	0.4	3.0	2.3	2.1	3.9	0.3
St. Louis	1,310	87.3	0.3	3.7	7.4	0.3	0.9	0.1
Louisville	81	86.4	0	6.2	3.7	2.5	1.2	0
Jacksonville	1,186	86.1	0.5	6.7	3.0	2.9	0.8	0
Salt Lake City	897	85.6	0.6	3.0	9.0	0.9	0.8	0.1
Richmond	975	85.0	0	0.7	12.3	0.7	1.3	0
San Diego	873	84.8	0.1	3.4	7.0	2.9	1.7	0.1
Fort Worth	1,361	84.7	0.6	4.1	6.5	3.1	1.0	0
Baltimore	105	81.9	0	1.0	9.5	4.7	1.0	1.9
Sacramento	711	80.7	0.1	3.4	12.4	1.0	2.4	0
Fresno	839	74.6	0	2.1	19.9	0.6	2.8	0
Norfolk	1,226	74.2	0	4.8	15.8	1.9	3.3	0
Amarillo	2,199	73.0	0	5.5	20.8	0.4	0.2	0.1
Boston	345	67.3	0	6.7	22.0	1.7	1.7	0.6
Orange County	626	66.6	0.2	4.0	16.9	3.4	8.9	0
Denver	531	59.7	0	3.0	7.9	9.8	18.5	1.1
Minneapolis	839	59.6	0	9.3	18.1	7.5	4.9	0.6
Palm Beach	430	54.9	0	4.2	30.9	1.4	8.4	0.2
Table	17,216	79.4	0.2	4.0	11.9	2.0	2.4	0.1

Note: Para PR is number of paragraphs containing PR behavior. PI is public information model; PA is press agentry model; 2A is two-way asymmetrical model; 2S is two-way symmetrical model; PI-2A is public information/two-way asymmetrical; PI-2S is public information/two-way symmetrical; and 2A-2S is two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical.

Table 3

Paragraphs Coded by Public Relations Model
(Ranked by Descending Percentage of One-Way Communication)

City	Col. Tol.	Col. PA/PI	Col. PI	Per. 1-way	Col. PI/2A/2S	Col. 2-way
Washington	37	0	34	91.2	3	8.8
Fort Wayne	6	4	1	88.1	1	11.9
Hartford	23	2	11	58.2	10	41.8
Wilmington	22	0	11	53.5	11	46.5
Baltimore	6	0	3	47.6	3	52.4
Portland	42	0	20	45.2	22	54.8
San Diego	45	1	15	37.0	29	63.0
Jacksonville	48	4	14	35.2	30	64.8
Richmond	36	0	12	33.7	24	66.3
Fort Worth	48	1	13	28.7	34	71.3
Salt Lake City	50	3	9	26.3	38	73.7
Fresno	48	0	10	24.8	38	75.2
St. Louis	47	2	6	16.8	39	83.2
Louisville	5	0	1	16.0	4	84.0
Norfolk	52	0	7	14.4	45	85.6
Sacramento	34	1	2	10.7	31	89.3
Orange County	46	1	3	9.1	42	90.9
Denver	53	0	4	8.9	49	91.1
Amarillo	92	1	8	8.1	83	91.9
Boston	23	0	1	6.4	22	93.6
Palm Beach	36	0	1	3.3	35	96.7
Minneapolis	46	0	1	2.5	45	97.5
Table	845	20	187	25.8	638	74.2

Note: PA is press agentry/one-way communication; PI is public information/one-way communication; 2A is two-way asymmetrical communication; 2S is two-way symmetrical communication; PI-2A is public information/two-way asymmetrical communication; PI-2S is public information/two-way symmetrical communication; and 2A-2S is two-way asymmetrical/two-way symmetrical communication. The percentages are for the total number of paragraphs of one-way communication and the total number of paragraphs that contain some degree of two-way communication.

Who's Responsible for Journalism?[1]

by John H. McManus

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Contemporary national codes of ethics hinge more on fantasy than fact: the idea that journalists control what becomes news. While journalists' influence over news has grown during much of the 20th century to the point where courts have begun to define them as professionals, it has never surpassed the influence of owners. New evidence indicates the authority delegated to the newsroom has begun to erode as media firms seek to maximize return to investors. As journalists' autonomy recedes, national ethics codes become less relevant to practitioners and more deceptive to the public. The codes also become unethical themselves to the extent that journalists become decision-takers rather than decision-makers. Moral responsibility and real world authority are diverging. It's time to end the charade by creating new codes that include the decision-makers outside the newsroom.

The shirt-sleeved news director of a television station in a mid-to-large-market was explaining why he denied my request to accompany his reporters as they gathered news. I had told him that I was studying news values. I would unobtrusively observe and occasionally ask journalists to explain their strategies.

He said he tells all of his reporters to imagine that when their story comes up in the newscast, he is handing them a certain number of viewers. He cupped two big hands together as if to hold the audience. "When their story is done I want them all back. The last thing I want them thinking about are news values." The news director added that this wasn't his idea. He only wanted to keep his job. "In this business," he explained, "you have to think with a cash register in your head."

In that newsroom, and in four other local television newsrooms where I was permitted to observe, journalists--from reporters and videographers to news directors--were much more decision-takers than decision-makers. Their autonomy was bounded by three universal commands: Do whatever it takes to maximize audience; Minimize cost; Don't embarrass big advertisers or the owners' other interests. Only after satisfying these demands were reporters and editors free to practice journalism as they saw fit. As a consequence, content was designed more to sell than

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inform. Abbreviated reports of simple, visual, emotional and obvious events displaced explanations of complex, significant and underlying issues (McManus, 1994).

Contrast the freedom of action in these newsrooms--which now supply most Americans with their news--with the expectations of journalism's national codes of ethics. Most codes imply that the journalist is a "professional" free of any obligations except responsibility to enlighten the public. And so they place full moral responsibility for news on the shoulders of individual practitioners. The American Society of Newspaper Editors Statement of Principles, for example, holds that: "The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time. Newspapermen and women who abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives or unworthy purposes are faithless to that public trust" (Fink, 1995; p. 307). No mention is made of publishers, station general managers, or executives of parent corporations with "cash registers in their heads" who might bend journalists to the wills of major investors, sponsors and powerful sources.

The present essay argues that contemporary national codes of ethics are based more on the fantasy that journalists control what becomes news than the reality of control by owners. In fact, a nearly century-long accretion of journalistic autonomy has stalled and appears to be eroding as corporations providing news seek to maximize return to shareholders. As it recedes, journalism's national ethics codes become less relevant to practitioners and more deceptive to the public. The codes also become unethical themselves to the extent that journalists become decision-takers rather than decision-makers. We need a more realistic code that recognizes those who wield power and assigns them appropriate responsibility.

The argument begins with an analysis of journalism's moral blueprints. It then compares their language to the research literature of reporter and editor autonomy, including recent court cases and surveys of American journalists in print and broadcast media. It concludes with a proposal for a new "structural" framework for journalism ethics that takes into account the growing influence of actors and forces outside the newsroom, such as the executives of corporations that own news media, the interests of corporate "siblings," and the markets for investors, advertisers, sources and consumers.

Analyzing codes of ethics

Although the question of who journalists are is not addressed in national codes, this analysis will count managers who supervise newsroom employees, but not those in other departments. And it includes all news department employees. In newspapers, everyone from the executive editor to contract or free-lance reporters and photographers is considered a journalist. In television, everyone working in the news department--from president of the news division at the network and news director at a local station--down to production assistant is included.

Of the four most widely cited codes--enacted by the Society of Professional Journalists, the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Associated Press Managing Editors and the Radio/Television News Directors Association--three begin with plausible and lofty language about the role of journalism in a democratic society. The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, for example, begins: "Members of the Society ... believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth ....(Code of Ethics, 1996. p.1). Each code then lists more specific do's and don'ts intended to realize these broad goals.

The oldest of American journalism's codes, written by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1922 and most recently revised in 1975 aims all of its moral injunctions at individual "practitioners," "journalists" and "newspaper men and women." No other actors are mentioned. Further, the code is cast as a covenant between two parties only. "These principles are intended to preserve, protect and strengthen the bond of trust and respect between American journalists and the American people..." (Fink, 1995; p. 307).

The newest code, updated by the Society of Professional Journalists in September 1996, also places responsibility for news solely and directly on journalists. No other actors are assigned moral duties. The code is divided into four sets of moral commands each of which begins with the phrase, "Journalists should."

The third such injunction says "Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know" (Code of Ethics, 1996. p.1). Under that heading it obliges journalists to "refuse gifts, fees, free travel and special treatment, shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations" that might conflict with objective reporting. All of these lie within the control of the individual journalist. He or she must give up some personal benefit to avoid an ethical breach. But parallel with these individual-level injunctions are others where it is not the *journalist's* self-interest that must be restrained, but that of the corporate or other *owner*. For example, journalists are obliged to "deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage." Here journalists are asked to decide when the owning corporation must deny itself benefits, such as revenues from advertisers, to avoid an ethical breach. By making no distinction between individual and corporate levels of obligation, the code implies that journalists have this authority.

The Radio/Television News Directors Association code begins: "The responsibility of radio and television journalists is to gather and report information of importance and interest to the public accurately, honestly and impartially" (Day, 1991, p. 353). It contains 10 references to individual broadcast journalists and one to the "broadcasting industry." No other actors are mentioned.

The Associated Press Managing Editors' code, revised in 1995, departs from the others in naming an institution, "the newspaper," as the principal subject of moral injunctions. It commands that "the newspaper should report the news without regard for its own interests, mindful of the need to disclose potential conflicts. It should not give favored news treatment to advertisers or special-interest groups" (APME, 1995). This language reduces the asymmetry of a subordinate class of employees--journalists--making decisions for the corporation that owns the newspaper. But it may not achieve parity.

For newspapers (and television stations) which are part of larger corporations, the subordinate local unit is still being asked to decide an issue that affects the bottom-line of the parent corporation. Given the hierarchical structure of conglomerate corporations, it is more likely that parent corporations will impose policies on their subsidiaries than the reverse. Corporate financial pressures on subordinate firms have occurred despite the protests of the most influential editors. Gene Roberts resigned as executive editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* rather than accept continuing cuts in resources for reporting. Under Roberts the *Inquirer* won 17 Pulitzer Prizes. The corporation applying the pressure was the chain with perhaps the nation's highest reputation for quality, Knight Ridder (Lambeth, 1991).

Common to each of these four national ethics codes is the notion that journalists--individually or in the aggregate--are, or should be, free of any business-related constraints imposed by those who pay them and distribute their work. In fact, the obligations are reversed. Corporations employing journalists are expected to conform to the demands of this special class of workers.

Such an arrangement turns upside down the usual direction of corporate authority. It deprives owners of their traditional right to use their assets as they see fit. Since the First Amendment's guarantee of press freedom has been interpreted as a privilege of the owner and not of the employees or of the community (Pember, 1997), this reversal might be seen as obstructing the spirit of the First Amendment. Before going any further, we should ask whether this unusual arrangement of employees making decisions for owners actually exits.

To what degree do journalists control news content?

Historical evidence indicates that American journalists have been bowing to the demands of owners since the marriage of the steam engine and the printing press gave birth to news as an industry in the 1830s (Stephens, 1988). According to Bates: " Will Irwin, Upton Sinclair, George Seldes, Morris Ernst, Oswald Garrison Villard, Leo Rosten and Robert Lasch all had analyzed how profit-seeking interfered with truth-seeking in the press; so had several critics of the 19th century" (1995, p. 25). The tension between the owner's business interests and journalism was one of the primary reasons Pulitzer proposed professionalizing journalism through higher education at the turn of the century (Schudson, 1978). This struggle also was the centerpiece of the Hutchins Commission's critique of the news at mid-century: "The press is ...caught between its desire to please and extend its audience and its desire to give a picture of events and people as they really are" (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. 57).

Several media historians (e.g., Schudson, 1995) have noted an accretion of authority for journalists beginning with the waning of the "Yellow Press" at the turn of the twentieth century. They note that journalists have become much better educated and compensated than the "ink-stained wretches" of earlier periods of American journalism.

Indeed, two recent court decisions--one each in print and broadcast news--have re-evaluated the U.S. Department of Labor's 50-year-old classification of journalism as a trade protected by wage and hour laws. In December 1994, a federal court judge ruled that former *Washington Post* reporter Thomas Sherwood was exercising professional prerogatives and receiving a professional level of pay. In April 1996, a federal court of appeals ruled that writers, editors and producers at NBC News must be classified as "artistic professionals" (Mifflin, 1996, p. D9).

The Sherwood case bears directly on journalistic autonomy. In her opinion Judge Norma Johnson noted:

> Sherwood's job ... required him to originate story ideas, piece together seemingly unrelated facts, analyze facts and circumstances and present news stories in an engaging style. The Court further finds that Sherwood's fact-gathering involved more than passively writing down what others told him. He was required to cultivate sources, utilize his imagination and other skills in seeking information, and continuously develop his finely tuned interviewing skills (*Sherwood v. Washington Post*, 1994, p. 1473).

While the evidence that Sherwood was a smart and highly skilled reporter is undeniable, the judge passed over how much the journalist's exercise of authority required permission. The evidence also showed Sherwood's choice of topic and story angle, his choice of sources, his handling of quotes, and the time he had to cultivate sources and write stories all were subject to approval by his superiors. Sherwood worked not within a structure of collegial control but within a hierarchy.

Even at a paper such as the *Post*, by reputation a paper where reporters have unusual freedom, editors were not elected by their peers, but appointed from above. The most influential manager was selected by business persons outside the newsroom. Similarly, the resources available to the newsroom were determined not by a committee of journalists, but outside the newsroom by the parent corporation's board of directors. Were Rupert Murdock to buy the *Post*, (God forbid!) he could change the operation of the newsroom as quickly as he did when he took over Britain's best-selling newspaper *The Sun* in 1974 and switched its orientation from labor to conservative (Murdock, 1994). As owner, Murdock could dismiss any journalist disagreeing with his notion of news without any hearing or professional due process. And Murdock could violate journalism's codes of ethics without fear of sanction because none contains enforcement language (Christians, 1985, 1989). The First Amendment would protect Murdock from any government response.

Not even the *Washington Post's* newsroom meets the standards of autonomy in journalism's national codes of ethics. Like many educated and skilled white collar employees, these journalists enjoy some authority over their work product. They are not assembly line workers. But their autonomy is clearly bounded by corporate superiors, not by allegiance to standards set by peers.

Ironically, during the same half century journalists were gaining those responsibilities Judge Johnson noted, scholars studying who has influence over the news were locating control over the news further and further from reporters and editors.

The notion of journalists as arbiters of news was implied in the famous "gatekeeper" study conducted by White (1950). But the 1950s were only half over when Breed (1956) contradicted the notion at least of reporter autonomy with his classic survey of 120 journalists at northeastern newspapers. He described a newsroom culture established by management and learned by journalists that--usually subtly-- enforced management's orientation toward news. The reporters' choice was to go along or get out.

From the 1970s into the early 80s researchers such as Epstein (1973) in network television, Sigal (1973), Sigalman (1973) and Fishman (1980) in newspapers, Powers (1977) and Bantz et al. (1980) in local television, Tuchman (1978) across several media, and Hirsch (1977) re-analyzing White's early data, documented that newsroom routines-- established more by their employers, than by journalists-- dictated news content and practice. Gans (1979) also located most control over news beyond the reach of journalists. He theorized a struggle between powerful sources and ratings-conscious media executives.

In the mid-1980's Altschull (1984) argued that news has always been controlled by those who finance it. For contemporary media, that means advertisers. Turow (1984, 1992) conceptualized journalists as holding only one of 13 power roles that determine media content. Bagdikian (1992) located most of the power to shape news well above the newsroom in corporate boardrooms. Herman and Chomsky (1988) went further still. They claimed that news is controlled by society's elites who use it as propaganda to legitimize their privilege and undermine challengers. Soloski (1989) argued that professionalism is a widely shared myth in American newsrooms that is manipulated by managers to control news work.

In the 1990's Auletta (1991), Squires (1993) and Underwood (1993) described the economic rationalization of network television and newspaper newsrooms in response to profit pressures from owners and the stock market. McQuail (1992) proposed an array of social forces outside the newsroom as the determiner of news. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) offered a five-level analysis in which owners of media firms exerted the greatest control. McManus (1994, 1995) theorized that news results from an elaborate compromise among powerful market-driven influences outside the newsroom.

Similarly, scholars who have analyzed the application of journalism ethics in newsrooms have found that journalists are more often the object than the subject of codes. Davenport (1985) randomly surveyed 100 newspaper managing editors and an equal number of local television news directors. Eighty percent of respondents who had written codes said they were imposed on the newsroom by managers with little rank-and-file discussion. In a review of research, Boeyink (1995) found that codes of ethics were effective only when publishers decided they were important. Beam (1990) surveyed 300 top editors at 60 newspapers of varying sizes. He found that professional autonomy makes more sense considered as an organization level, rather than individual level, variable. Meyer's (1987) analysis of a national survey of newspapers also found a corporate culture that promoted or interfered with journalism norms. "Power in an organization is not, of course, evenly divided among its members," he wrote. "A strong publisher creates a corporate culture that can leave its mark on an organization long after he or she is gone (p. 97)." Writing about reporters across the spectrum of the American news industry, Fink (1995) concluded:

> Either you and the hand that feeds you agree on ethics in reporting and writing, or you (not your editor) will be a very unhappy employee--or unemployed (p. 91).

Recent trends in journalistic autonomy

Random surveys, each of more than a thousand U.S. journalists, conducted every 10 years since the early 1970s suggest that journalism's century-long ascent toward professionalism has stalled and may, in fact, be reversing. The newsroom surveys show a strong trend toward declining journalistic autonomy. Weaver and Wilhoit, who conducted the last two surveys, wrote:

> Compared to the early 1970s, journalists in the 1982 sample reported a significant decline in their freedom to decide news story emphasis and editing. The 1992 interviews suggest that newsroom autonomy has diminished further, and at a startling pace. For the first time in three decades, barely half of reporters see themselves as having the kind of clout in the newsroom that their predecessors did. And the lessening autonomy is occurring at a time when many in the work force--who entered the profession during a tide of heavy hiring of young staff in the late 1970s and early 1980s--have been in the newsroom long enough to have established their authority (1994; p. 9).

Four out of five journalists laid the loss of autonomy to profit-driven management decisions as well as pressure from government, advertisers or from a hostile public (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1994). A comment the researchers deemed typical read: "There is increasing pressure from large corporations, including my own, for bottom-line profit and gains at the expense of long-term quality" (p. 12). By contrast, only 8 percent said they were hindered by professional standards of ethics, good taste or objectivity.

Other surveys show a similar trend. A 1993 Associated Press Managing Editors survey of 627 newspaper journalists showed rising discontent from a survey eight years earlier, particularly among the young, minorities and the best educated (Fitzgerald, 1993). Almost half the journalists with graduate degrees counted themselves dissatisfied enough to want to leave their jobs. "About half of these dissatisfied journalists say they do not have sufficient autonomy on the job," the report said, "they lack resources to do their jobs properly and they are not very impressed with the quality of their newspapers" (p. 26).

A 1995 APME study of newsroom managers also showed less autonomy and greater stress than a similar survey in 1983 (Fitzgerald, 1995). "Fully 66 percent of responding editors said their news hole was reduced in the past year. Half reported losing news staffers who were not replaced. Eighty percent reported that 'there is more work than I can complete in a normal day'" (p. 11). All of these limitations were imposed from above the newsroom.

Summing up these changes for newspapers in an article entitled "The Thrill is Gone," Stepp (1995) concluded: "In the age old battle between the editorial side and the business side, the editorialists have lost the upper hand" (p. 16). In local television--the part of the news industry growing fastest over the past several decades in employment, consumer loyalty and influence over news practice (McManus, 1994)-- the outlook for journalistic autonomy is more dismal still. According to Fink (1995), "In television sheer perversity is at work--a sort of Gresham's Law of Journalism: poor quality, low-cost entertainment shows drive out high quality, high-cost news programming" (p. 148).

If these assessments are accurate, journalists are more decision-takers than decision-makers. While they cannot disavow responsibility for their actions so long as they retain the option to quit their jobs, their authority to produce high quality ethical news reports is circumscribed, tightly for some, loosely for others. A fundamental principle of ethics is that those with the greatest power bear the greatest moral accountability. Journalism's ethical codes have it backwards.

What is needed

A recent text on media ethics concluded: [I]t's futile to discuss...efforts by individuals to practice ethical journalism without examining the corporate profit motive and its impact on those efforts" (Fink, 1995, p. 139). The major American codes of journalism ethics, however, not only fail to examine the corporate profit motive, most don't even recognize its existence.

Difficult structural ethical questions lie at the heart of journalism conducted by profit-seeking businesses. Particularly in the modern newsroom where barriers between the business side and the news side have been lowered or eliminated (Underwood, 1993), journalism ethics must speak to potential conflicts of interest with powerful news-shapers outside the newsroom. Drawing on theoretical work by (Turow, 1984, 1992; McQuail, 1992 and McManus, 1995) at least eight such powerful actors can be identified. In each case there should be both a prescription of an optimal relationship and an enforceable ethical proscription to protect the news department's interest in providing news that maximizes public understanding from the media firm's narrow self-interest in serving the following constituencies:

1. *Shareholders/owners*. If they seek maximum short-term returns on their investment, they may balk at spending what quality journalism requires (Stone, 1993; Rather, 1993; Meyer, 1995).
2. Rational *advertisers* seek the largest audience of potential customers in a context that both lends their claims credibility yet encourages consumption, all at the lowest cost (Bogart, 1991; Lesly, 1991; Singer, 1991; Collins, 1992; Zachary, 1992; Lieberman, 1994). In contrast, quality journalism seeks the largest audience regardless of customer potential--wealth--and freedom from bias toward advertisers and the ethic of consumption.
3. *Sources* may manipulate the supply of raw material for news in order to gain favorable exposure to their ideas and often themselves (Boorstin, 1961; Gandy, 1982; Entman, 1989; Jamieson, 1992; Mundy, 1992). In contrast, ethical journalism gathers information without fear or favor and without regard to the information subsidies of public relations.
4. *Consumers*: More people may be attracted to entertaining than informative content (Davie, 1992; McManus, 1992; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1995). Further, quality journalism that challenges popular myths and prejudices may drive away some consumers (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947).

5. *Government.*: In an environment where parent conglomerates of media firms own companies affected by government regulation or government contracts, or simply by government spending, there may be pressure for biased news in return for favors (Bagdikian, 1992).

6. *Parent corporations* may exert pressure to report favorably or at least not initiate negative coverage of corporate siblings and their business interests (Miller, 1996).

7. *Media firms*, represented by the newspaper publisher or TV station general manager or network CEO, may not allocate adequate resources to its news department given the greater profitability of other choices, such as entertainment programming, or entertainment-oriented sections of a newspaper, or other business interests (Bailey, 1984; Kaniss, 1991; Squires, 1993).

8. *Pressure groups* including social institutions may exert influence on the newsroom for content that does not offend the group's sensibilities or that furthers its agenda (McQuail, 1992). Quality journalism, however, is independent, acting in the best interest of the entire community.

Conclusion

The details of such a structural ethics of journalism are beyond the scope of this article. Fresh thinking about how to define, measure and enforce a new moral code for news is urgently needed. Even the most modest proposal is likely to be highly controversial since structural ethics must negotiate the First Amendment, and more importantly, intrude on the "forbidden" realm of ownership prerogatives of private enterprises (McChesney, 1992). My purpose here has been restricted to demonstrating that the current expressions of national codes of ethics ignore or gloss over the most serious moral issues in contemporary journalism. As long as they do, journalism's codes of ethics are themselves suspect ethically. At best, they are incomplete. At worst, they confuse and discourage needed reforms by permitting those who control the news to deflect criticism from themselves onto their employees.

Notes

1. The author would like to thank professors Edmund B. Lambeth of the University of Missouri and Clifford Christians of the University of Illinois for conversations and comments on an earlier draft.

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Of Sports Pages and Bad Attitudes:
An Investigation of the Relationship between Attention to Sports Media and Attitudes toward Women's Sports

Paper presented at the annual conference of AEJMC
Chicago, Illinois, July, 1997

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Of Sports Pages and Bad Attitudes:
An Investigation of the Relationship between
Attention to Sports Media and Attitudes toward Women's Sports

Abstract

Telephone survey data (n = 397) are used to assess the relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports, predicting that greater attention to sports media is associated with negative attitudes toward women's sports. The study draws on sports feminism, the elaboration likelihood model, and Creedon's powerful, contingent, and contextual effects model. The author finds little support for the hypotheses and discusses problems with question wording, social desirability, and a possible change in sports media content.

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INTRODUCTION

In the body of literature sometimes called sports feminism, numerous content analyses of sports media have identified ways in which television sports broadcasts and newspaper sports pages underrepresent and trivialize women's sports. These studies have shown, for example, that women's sports are given far less coverage than men's sports in newspapers (Theberge & Cronk, 1986; Klein, 1988; Alexander, 1994a), in magazines (Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Duncan & Sayaovong, 1990), and in television broadcasts of sports events in which men and women compete in identical events (Bryson, 1987; Duncan, Messner, Williams & Jensen, 1990; Alexander, 1994b). Other studies have revealed ways in which female athletes and their endeavors have been trivialized, marginalized, and sexualized by the sports media, especially in television broadcasts (e.g., Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Messner, Duncan & Jensen, 1993; Daddario, 1994; Halbert & Latimer, 1994).

The assumption that accompanies these studies is that media content that ignores or trivializes women's sports has a negative influence on the thinking of those who attend to the media. Jennifer Hargreaves (1994, p. 196) articulates this assumption when she argues that "the relative neglect of women's sports and the ways in which they are represented confirm for many people ideas that they have already internalized from other experiences." She goes on to explain that "the construction and marginalization of female sports provide a hidden, but very powerful, message that they are less important than men's sports and that men are keener to participate and naturally better suited to do so" (p. 196). These negative messages about women's sports seem to be the concern of all of the sports media researchers cited above. However, I am unaware of any attempt to establish empirically a causal relationship between sports media messages and negative attitudes toward women's sports. This is undoubtedly because such a relationship would be very difficult to establish due to the interaction between sports media messages, messages from other sources, and personal views.

Nonetheless, some support for the assumption might be found by comparing the attitudes of those who rarely, if ever, attend to sports media with the attitudes of the avid sports fan to see if there are any significant differences between the two groups. Support might also be found by assessing the correlation between the amount of attention a person pays to sports media and his or her attitudes toward women's sports, particulalry if one were to control for certain characteristics of the audience member that might modify or strengthen this relationship. The present study attempts to do just that through survey research. This research springs from three somewhat unrelated theories that I have woven together because each can be seen to support the assumption under investigation and because each contributes to an explanation for the relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports.

THEORY

Theoretical Perspective

This study was conceived from the perspective of sports feminism, which is a movement to eradicate discrimination on account of biological sex in sports (Hargreaves, 1994). Like most feminist theories, which are "grounded in a concern about, and desire to effect change in, the subjugated status of women" (Cirksena & Cuklanz, 1992, p. 18), sports feminism calls into question the patriarchal nature of sport (Brown, 1986).

As with feminist theories, one should acknowledge the various strains of sports feminism, as Hargreaves (1994) cautions:

> Sports feminism is not a unified movement or idea, nor can its forms easily be characterized as cultural, liberal, orthodox Marxist, radical, or socialist, so that they would tie in with categories of feminism found in the general debate about the causes of women's subordination (p. 26).

However, two of the most pervasive strains of sports feminism, liberal and separatist, do bear some resemblance to liberal feminism and radical feminism, respectively. "Liberal sports feminism challenges historically acquired inequalities in sports between men and women, but it is not a challenge to the conventional character of modern sports or to the 'essential' nature of modern capitalism and patriarchy" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 27). Separatist sports feminists argue for sex-based separation in terms of education, competition, and governance (pp. 30-31).

The important contribution of sports feminism to sports sociology and, by extension, to sports media research, according to Hargreaves (1994),

> has been to uncover ways in which men's power over women in sports has been institutionalized; it has provided a practical and symbolic challenge to male privilege which has resulted in a general recognition of gender as a basic category of analysis, and it has raised consciousness about the complexities and contradictions of gender relations in sports theory and practice (p. 26).

This study, using gender as a basic category of analysis, attempts to uncover one way in which men's power over women in sport has been institutionalized (through sports media messages) while taking into account some of the complexities of the attitude change process in terms of the personal contexts and experiences of media audience members.

Two Models of Media Effects

The relationship between mass media messages and audience attitudes has been the subject of study for many decades. Dating back to the persuasion research of Harold Lasswell in the 1930s and Carl Hovland in the 1940s and '50s, social scientists have been trying to build a universal model to explain this complicated relationship. One of the more recent models is the elaboration likelihood model, developed by John Cacioppo and Richard Petty (1985). This model has gained favor in the scholarly community because it is sufficiently complex to account for a large variety of circumstances and persuasion outcomes.

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is primarily designed to explain the cognitive process through which attitudes yield to persuasive messages (Petty & Priester, 1994). Though the sports media messages that have been critiqued by sports feminists are not necessarily intended to persuade, the ELM is useful here because it does account for persuasion that occurs when the audience member is not actively considering an attitude change and because it acknowledges a number of variables that can intervene in the persuasion process.

The elaboration likelihood model identifies two "routes to persuasion" (Petty & Priester, 1994, p. 98). The first, or "central route," to persuasion is direct and "involves effortful cognitive activity whereby the person draws upon prior experience and knowledge in order to carefully scrutinize all of the information relevant to determining the central merits of the position advocated" (p. 98). This process is said to be highly elaborated. The second, or "peripheral route," involves much less elaboration, as it does not require effortful evaluation of the persuasive communication. Variables that interact in the persuasion process include the person's motivation to process the message, the person's *ability* to process the message, the person's initial attitude, and the quality of the argument. Messages are processed peripherally "when a person's motivation or ability to process the issue-relevant information is low" (p. 101).

This model, particularly the peripheral route, which is more susceptible to subtle cues, is useful in explaining how repeated exposure to sports media messages that glorify men's sports and demean women's sports might influence the attitudes of those who receive these messages. It is also useful in that it takes into account cognitive states (low interest, low comprehension) and message characteristics (unconvincing, unclear) that might interfere with attitude change. This could help to explain why some heavy users of sports media might not have negative attitudes toward women's sports and vice versa. However, as mentioned above, the elaboration likelihood model is really intended to explain the process by which a single message may lead to a specific attitude change, not how widely held social conceptions, such as sex roles, are repeatedly reproduced and reinforced by the mass media.

Thus, for further insight into the relationship being investigated, we turn to the powerful, contingent and contextual effects model proposed by Pamela J. Creedon. This model "builds on the accumulated knowledge of the earlier [effects] models" (Creedon, 1994, p. 12) and, to compensate for their inability to reliably predict media effects, Creedon's model "integrates critical insights about context" (p. 12), which have emerged from critical cultural and feminist theories. "Both traditions [cultural theories and feminist theories] suggest that to understand media effects one must understand the cultural contexts in which the messages are received" (p. 12).

Thus, the powerful, contingent and contextual effects model states that the media are powerful, but their power is contingent on many contextual factors, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ideologies, and political, social, and economic structures. This model "accounts for the fact that different individuals view the world differently based on the way that they have experienced it" (p. 12). This model can be applied to attitude change resulting from repeated exposure to a message, as well as to change resulting from a single exposure. The model contributes to our expectations about the relationship between negative media messages and negative attitudes in that it cautions us not to expect such messages to affect all people in the same way or to the same extent.

Hypotheses

The present study attempts to take into account some of the contextual factors identified in Creedon's model and in the writings of the cultural and feminist theorists while still trying to identify general patterns in the media exposure and attitude equation, which would provide some support for the assumption of sports feminists regarding the role of the media in reinforcing negative views of women's sports and female athletes. To that end, I propose three hypotheses. The first predicts a general relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports.

> H1) The more a person attends to sports media, the more unfavorable are that person's attitudes toward women's sports.

This hypothesis broadly tests the sports feminism proposition that the negative messages regarding women's sports that were identified in the content analyses discussed earlier (that women's sports are uninteresting, unimportant, and inferior to men's sports and that female athletes need not be taken seriously) are pervasive and that they have a persuasive effect on audience members, causing them to have negative attitudes toward women's sports. Specifically, this hypothesis predicts that increased exposure to such messages will be associated with increasingly negative views of women's sports. If such a relationship exists, the hypothesis should be supported by the survey data.

The independent variable in Hypothesis 1 is attention to sports media. This variable refers to the amount of time a person spends in an average week attending to sports media; that is, reading the sports pages of a newspaper, listening to sports news or live sports broadcasts on the radio, and watching sports news or broadcasts of sporting events on television (both broadcast and cable).

The dependent variable is attitudes toward women's sports. This variable is a composite, or index, of several specific attitudes toward women's sports. These are: the importance of women's sports as compared to men's sports; whether women's sports are exciting; whether women enjoy sports competition; and whether women are good athletes.

The remaining hypotheses involve the same independent and dependent variables as the first hypothesis, but they also incorporate some of the context variables advocated by the powerful, contingent and contextual effects model, specifically those that may enhance or diminish the relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports. These hypotheses predict that the correlation will be more pronounced among people who have never played competitive sports and people who do not have a close female family member who plays competitive sports because, for people who have them, these personal experiences could serve to negate or mitigate the effects of negative media messages. These hypotheses and their theoretical linkages are as follows:

> H2) Heavy users of sports media who have *never* played competitive sports will have attitudes toward women's sports that are less favorable than those of medium and light users of sports media who *have* played competitive sports.
>
> H3) Heavy users of sports media who *do not* have a close *female* family member who plays competitive sports will have attitudes toward women's sports that are less favorable than those of medium and light users of sports media who *do* have a close female family member who plays sports.

These hypotheses are based in part on theories of selective processes (e.g., Klapper, 1960), which state that "people tend to expose themselves to those mass communications that are in accord with their existing attitudes and interests" (Klapper, 1960, p. 19) and that "reinforcement is or may be abetted by predispositions" (pp. 18-19). Additionally, the elaboration likelihood model posits that one of the factors that can promote or inhibit persuasion is a person's initial attitude. Thus, if a person already has favorable attitudes toward women's sports based on his or her personal experiences, that person's attitudes are less likely to be shaped or changed by negative media portrayals of women's sports and vice versa.[1]

These two hypotheses are also based on active audience theories and their conceptions of resistant readings. In other words, these hypotheses acknowledge that people who have participated in organized, competitive sports and people whose mother, sister, wife, or daughter participates in competitive sports may filter out or resist the negative messages about women's sports said to permeate the sports media. Their first-hand experience with competitive sports and with women's and girls' participation in competitive sports may mitigate the influence that the sports media have (assuming, again, that they do perpetually represent women's sports negatively). Thus, a more negative set of attitudes toward women's sports might be expected among people who have no personal experience as athletes and among those who do not have a close female family member who participates in competitive sports.

Finally, biological sex, level of education, and income are three more context variables that might enhance or diminish the strength of the relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports. These were used as control variables in the statistical test of Hypothesis 1.

METHOD

Survey research was used to test these hypotheses. The researcher contributed a number of items to a larger survey written by eight graduate students and the instructor of an advanced survey research methods class. The study, a telephone survey of adults living in a mid-sized city in the northeastern United States, was conducted over a 14-day period[2] in the fall of 1996.

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[1] Such a person might also pay little attention to sports media *because* of the negative messages about women's sports, which would be in keeping with Hypothesis 1.

[2] Interviews were conducted from 9:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. Mondays through Saturdays and from 1:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. on Sundays.

A CD-ROM telephone directory (SelectPhone, Northeast, 1997, first quarter) was used to develop the sampling frame for the study. All telephone numbers within the local calling area of the city of . . . were initially selected from the CD-ROM database. From these, all business and duplicate telephone numbers were eliminated, producing a list of 197,000 residential telephone numbers in the city and its surrounding suburbs. This list was used as the sampling frame. These 197,000 numbers were randomly ordered, based on a computer-generated list of random numbers, and a sample of 1,150 numbers was selected and divided into groups of 50 telephone numbers to create 26 replicates of 50 numbers each.

Further randomization within each household was achieved through the use of the Kish method of respondent selection. This method was also used to help ensure that older people and males would not be under-represented in the study.

A week prior to the start of the official survey, a pre-test of the instrument was conducted on a Saturday morning and afternoon. The graduate students in the survey research course interviewed 25 respondents drawn from a random sample of (. . .)-area residential telephone numbers. The same interviewing techniques that would be used in the actual survey were used in the pre-test. The data collected from the pretest were examined, and based on this information, some items on the instrument were eliminated and others were reworded. In addition, new codes were created for open-ended items and items with an "other, specify" category.

The revised instrument contained 120 items, reflecting the varied research interests of the eight members of the survey research class. Eighteen of the items on the instrument were used in the present study.

The interviewers for the actual survey were 44 graduate students of the (. . .) School at (. . .) University. Fifteen of these interviewers were provided with two hours of training before their first four-hour interviewing shift and an additional hour of training subsequent to their first shift. The other 25 were provided with 80 minutes of training prior to their first shift and no subsequent training, though they did receive ongoing coaching from shift supervisors. All interviewers were also provided with training manuals which explained how to make initial contact with respondents, how to ask survey questions in a consistent manner, how to persuade reluctant respondents, and how to convert refusals. The manuals also included an explanation of acceptable prompts and feedback comments that interviewers were allowed to use.

The eight graduate students in the survey research class served as supervisors during data collection. The supervisors managed the paperwork, evaluated interviewers, gave interviewers telephone numbers to call, verified 10% of all completed questionnaires, and conducted interviews as time permitted. Supervisors also made sure that at least one attempt was made to convert every refusal into a completed survey.

After two days of interviewing, a coding and analysis committee reviewed the first 101 completed instruments for additional coding possibilities and created new codes as necessary. After the two-week survey period, the supervisors worked together to code all of the completed instruments in accordance with the new coding categories. When this task was completed, supervisors independently entered the data into SPSS databases, resulting in six separate databases, which were merged by the coding and analysis committee. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were run on each variable, the data were reviewed, and obvious errors in the database were corrected. These three steps were then repeated in order to catch errors not noticed in the first iteration. In addition, a 10% sample of each person's data entry work was examined and cleaned by the coding and analysis committee.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Attention to sports media, the independent variable in all three hypotheses, was measured by respondents' answers to three questions regarding their use of sports media. These questions were worded as follows:

> "How many days per week do you listen to live sports or sports news on the radio?"
>
> "How many days a week do you watch live sports or sports news on TV?"
>
> "How many days a week do you read sports?"

This last item was asked toward the end of a series of questions regarding the frequency with which respondents read different sections of the newspaper; thus, the wording of the question made sense in the context in which it was asked. This series of questions was introduced as follows: "Now I would like to ask you about different parts of the newspaper. Please tell me, in an average week, how many days do you read . . ." The first item simply completed the question with "world news." Respondents who said that they read the world news section of the paper at least once a week were then asked, "On an average day, about how much time do you spend reading world news?" They were then asked the same two questions about national news, state news, and local news before being asked about the sports pages.

Respondents' answers to these three days-per-week items were summed to create an index of attention to sports media. The range, then, for this index was zero (for those who said they do not attend to sports content delivered by any of the three media) to 21 (for those who said they attend to all three media for sports information every day). This ratio level index, though perhaps not as precise as an index of minutes per week attending to sports media, was thought to work well for three reasons: a) it gives a general idea of the attention that respondents pay to sports media, b) it is sufficiently broad to reveal variance in the data, and c) it is probably more accurate than a measure of minutes per week because it eliminates the error involved with respondents trying to calculate an average number of minutes for an activity that is generally not performed for an equal number of minutes each day.

The dependent variable for each of the hypotheses, attitudes toward women's sports, was measured by respondents' answers to four survey items. These items involved statements about women's sports followed by Likert scale response options. The statements used in the study were based on attitudes said to be engendered by the negative and nonexistent media coverage of women's sports, particularly those articulated by Hargreaves (p. 196, 1994), as discussed earlier. The items were introduced on the survey as follows:

> For the next several questions, please consider your answers in terms of the sports world and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement. Please say whether you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree after I read each statement.

The items appeared on the instrument in the following order.

> "In general, women's sports are not as important as men's sports."
>
> "In general, women's sports are not exciting."
>
> "Most women don't enjoy athletic competition."
>
> "Most women are not good athletes."

After reading each statement, interviewers read a prompt ("Would you say you . . .") and the list of response options. Responses were initially coded 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree. Because the items were all phrased negatively, the most *negative* attitudes were indicated by the *highest* numbers—5 for strongly agree and 4 for agree. This runs counter to our common sense understanding of positive and negative, so the responses were recoded in reverse order so that the most negative attitudes were given low scores (1 for strongly agree, 2 for agree) and the most positive attitudes were given high scores (4 for disagree and 5 for strongly disagree with the negative statements). "Neutral" responses continued to be coded as 3.

A note about the wording of the first attitude item: this item involves a direct comparison of women's sports to men's sports for two reasons. First, I wanted to give context to the word "important" so that respondents would not think of the importance of women's sports in comparison to life-or-death issues, such as war and famine, or to things needed for survival, such as food and shelter, which would lead most respondents to disagree with the statement, and 2) I wanted to know if a comparison to men's sports would bring out more agreement than statements that did not involve such a comparison. I did not phrase all four items this way, though, because the assumption and hypotheses being tested pertain specifically to the media portrayal of women's sports, not of women's sports relative to men's sports, which is only one aspect of the portrayal.

An attempt was made to combine the four attitude items into an additive index. However, the reliability of this index was not high enough to justify its use[3], so each hypothesis test was run four times, once for each attitude item.

The second hypothesis predicts the same negative relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports as predicted in Hypothesis 1, but the prediction involves another independent variable: whether the respondent has ever played competitive sports. The hypothesis predicts an interaction between the respondent's personal experience with sports and the attention he or she pays to sports media (the other independent variable), such that people who have never played competitive sports and who pay a great deal of attention to sports media will view women's sports more negatively than will those who have played competitive sports and who pay little attention to the sports media. Attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports were measured as described above. Personal involvement in competitive sports was determined by a survey item that read as follows:

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[3] Cronbach's alpha was .59.

> "Do you now or have you ever played competitive sports, besides in gym class?"

Respondents were categorized according to whether they said yes or no to this question.

Similarly, Hypothesis 3 predicts an interaction between two independent variables, attention to sports media and the experience of having a female family member who participates in competitive sports. Attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports were measured as described above. The other independent variable, being related to a female athlete, was measured by a survey item that asked:

> "Do you have a close female family member who plays competitive sports?"

As in Hypothesis 2, respondents were categorized by their response to this yes-or-no question.

Statistics Used in the Analysis

Partial correlation coefficients and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses. Prior to running these statistical tests, however, the reliability of each of the indices was assessed. The alpha for the index of attention to sports media was .72, which was considered sufficiently high to justify using this index in the statistical tests. As mentioned previously, the alpha for the index of attitudes toward women's sports was rather low, only .59. Thus, the hypotheses were tested on each of the attitude items separately, rather than on the additive index of the four items.

RESULTS

The survey yielded 397 completed interviews and sixteen partial interviews. The procedural response rate for the survey was 79%, and the demographic make-up of the survey sample closely matched that of the local community with two important exceptions: the sample contained more women than the community (58.7% as opposed to 51.98%), and the sample contained more college educated people than the community as a whole (77.6% of the sample had some college or more, whereas only 50.69% of the community has some college or more, according to 1990 U.S. Census data). The average age of respondents was 46 years, and the average household income was approximately $40,000.

Survey respondents said they pay relatively little attention to sports media. The means for each of the three sports media use items was very low (1.7 days per week for sports on the radio, 2.6 days per week for sports on TV, and 2.3 days per week for reading the sports section of the newspaper) (see Table 1). These low means are partly due to a bimodal distribution wherein a large percentage said they never attend to any sports media and another group, a considerably smaller percentage, said they read, watch or listen to the sports media every day. For example, 106 people said they never watch live sports or sports news on TV, and 71 said they watch live sports or sports news on TV seven days a week.

For the most part, respondents disagreed with the survey items regarding attitudes toward women's sports. Over 75% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that women's sports are not exciting, that women don't enjoy athletic competition, and that women are not good athletes. Somewhat more variability was found in responses to the first item, "Women's sports are not as important as men's sports" (see Table 1), perhaps because of the direct comparison to men's sports, but even on this item, over 60% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. These descriptive statistics foreshadow the outcomes of the statistical tests, which found very little support for the hypotheses.

As predicted, the partial correlation tests revealed negative relationships between attention to sports media and three of the attitudes toward women's sports, indicating that, to some degree at least, the more attention respondents paid to sports media, the more negative their attitudes toward women's sports. However, the relationship was *positive* for the attitude item that read, "Women don't enjoy sports competition," implying that the more attention respondents paid to the sports media, the more likely they were to *disagree* with this statement. This is the opposite of what was predicted by Hypothesis 1.

Furthermore, the correlations were not significant on any of the items except for the item that read, "Women's sports are not exciting." The correlation between attention to sports media and this attitude was weak (–.11, and ranging from –.09 to –.11 when controlling for sex, education and income), but it was significant at the 95% confidence level, even when controlling for sex, education, income, and most combinations thereof (see Table 3).

For the analyses of variance, values for "attention to sports media" were consolidated into low, medium, and high attention categories in order to maximize cell size. The ANOVAs revealed no significant differences between the attitudes of people who pay low, medium, or high attention to sports media (Tables 4 through 7). In fact, the mean attitude scores of each of these groups (low, medium and high attenders) were very similar.

Having played competitive sports did not seem to affect a person's attitudes toward women's sports, as there were no significant differences between the attitude scores of those who have played competitive sports and those who haven't. Nor did having a female family member involved in competitive sports seem to affect a person's attitudes toward women's sports, as no significant differences were found between those who have a female athlete in the family and those who don't.

Interestingly, the only aspect of the ANOVAs to achieve significance ($p < .05$) was the three-way interaction of attention to sports media, personal experience playing competitive sports, and having a female family member who plays competitive sports on the attitude that women's sports are not exciting (see Table 5).

Why this attitude and none of the others achieved some significance in both statistical tests is unclear. However, the consistent, albeit weak, findings of both tests do lend some support for the hypothesis that increased exposure to sports media is associated with less favorable attitudes toward women's sports, specifically that women's sports are not exciting.

DISCUSSION

This study was conceived from the perspective of sports feminism, a movement which seeks to eradicate sex-based discrimination[4] in the sports world. This study attempted to find support for the assumption or proposition that the sports media portrayal of women's sports (presumed to be incomplete and unflattering, based on prior research findings) negatively affects audience members' attitudes toward women's sports. This study also attempts to take into account some of the complexities of the attitude change process in terms of the personal contexts of audience members, as suggested by Creedon (1994).

The hypotheses being tested stated that there is a negative linear relationship between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports; in other words, the more attention a person pays to sports media, the more negative their attitudes toward women's sports will be. Two secondary hypotheses stated that this relationship would be stronger for people who have no personal experience playing competitive sports and for people who do not have a female family member who plays competitive sports, as these people would have more limited real-life exposure to women in athletics.

Though the findings of this study do not strongly support the hypotheses, they do indicate that the assumption being tested may have some merit. For at least one of the attitude items tested (the view that women's sports are not exciting), the relationship between attention to sports media and attitude toward women's sports was negative, and though not particularly strong, the correlation was statistically significant.

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[4] Sports feminism also seeks to eradicate discrimination based on race, class and sexual orientation, but the eradication of sex-based discrimination is thought by some to be its primary goal.

A number of circumstances have conspired to prevent a confident pronouncement that sports media messages *do* lead to negative attitudes toward women's sports. First of all, this study, being a survey, could never fully support an effects hypothesis; it could merely show a correlation between the variables.

Secondly, support for this assumption was only found in relation to one of four attitude items. In order to make a strong argument for a correlation between increased sports media attention and lowered esteem for women's sports, we would need to see strong support for a number of attitude items or for a reliable index of attitude items.

Thirdly, this study was probably not the best possible test of such a correlation. The wording of the interviewers' introduction to the attitude items or of the attitude items themselves may not have elicited respondents' true attitudes toward women's competitive sports. In particular, the items may have been too vague. Respondents may have thought of city league softball or other recreational sports when the statements about "women's sports" were read to them, whereas I had professional and semi-professional (i. e., college scholarship) sports in mind when writing the statements. It's also possible that some respondents answered for society as a whole, i.e., how our society views women's sports, rather than offer their own personal opinions about women's sports. of the attitude items may also have led respondents to answer

In addition, the negative phrasing and the sweeping generalities of the attitude items, coupled with the fact that over half of the interviewers were women, may have caused a social desirability confound. Perhaps male respondents were reluctant to agree—particularly to a female interviewer—that women's sports are not important, exciting, et cetera, for fear of sounding like a chauvinist, even if they did agree. Even female respondents may have been loathe to agree with such statements, regardless of how they view women's sports, simply because the statements were phrased so negatively and the generalizations were so broad.

Furthermore, this sample, which was clustered so disproportionately around low attention and very positive attitudes, may not have contained the variability necessary to plot a linear relationship. As mentioned above, respondents to this survey reported fairly low attention to the sports media, and a majority disagreed in response to each of the attitude items. Thus, one could argue that heavy users of sports media and even people with negative attitudes toward women's sports were underrepresented in the survey sample.

Of course, the findings of this study leave the door wide open for the argument that the assumption is simply not true, either because the sports media do not present (or *no longer* present) a barrage of negative messages about women's sports or because even if they do, this has no effect on the attitudes of audience members. Some might argue that coverage of women's sports has increased in quantity and improved in quality in recent years, such that female athletes and their contests are treated with as much respect and nearly as much adulation as male athletes and their contests. Some of the author's own recent research supports this argument (Weidman, 1997). In fact, this seems to be the most plausible explanation for the generally positive attitudes toward women's sports indicated in the survey, and such changes in the coverage of women's sports would also help to explain why the predicted relationship was only weakly supported in this study.

However, it still seems reasonable to think that when and if sports writers and broadcasters *do* trivialize or marginalize women's sports, younger audiences in particular get the message that women's sports aren't very important or popular and that female athletes should not be taken seriously. I would argue that even the minimal support found here is reason enough to investigate this assumption further. Future research may involve surveys with attitude items that are more specific and emphasize that the interviewer is requesting the respondent's personal opinion, not that of society as a whole. Such items should be phrased both positively and negatively in order to determine whether a social desirability confound is at work. It might also be appropriate to include attitudes not included in this study, such as whether or not it is appropriate or attractive for women to play sports.

Future research might also be conducted in another market or at another time of year in an attempt to include more medium and heavy sports media users in the study, though I am not convinced that the market or the season are to blame for the relative lack of attention to sports media among survey respondents. The sports media offerings available in the survey area via television, radio, and newspapers were plentiful and diverse during the two weeks of data collection; the extremely popular university football team was playing locally once a week, and professional and college football, major league baseball, and major league hockey games from around the country were being broadcast and reported on regularly at the time of the survey (the last week of September and the first week of October).

Finally, other research methods should be employed in future investigations of this problem. Experiments may get closer to establishing a causal linkage between attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports, and additional content analyses could assess whether the sports media are *currently* sending out messages that trivialize and otherwise degrade female athletes and women's sports. A longitudinal content analysis, in particular, might reveal whether the sports media have changed over time in terms of how they portray female athletes and women's sports.

TABLE 1. Means and standard deviations for sports media use, attitudes toward women's sports, personal involvement in sports items, and demographic variables.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
How many days per week do you listen to live sports or sports news on the radio?[a]	1.70	2.57	391
How many days a week do you watch live sports or sports news on TV?[a]	2.60	2.56	393
How many days a week do you read sports?[a]	2.31	2.94	388
Attention to sports index[b]	6.60	6.45	378
In general, women's sports are not as important as men's sports.[c]	3.42	1.25	394
In general, women's sports are not exciting.[c]	3.79	.97	391
Most women don't enjoy athletic competition.[c]	3.81	.98	386
Most women are not good athletes.[c]	4.03	.88	396

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[a] Responses were coded from 0 to 7 days a week.

[b] The sum of scores from three sports media use questions. Cronbach's alpha = .72

[c] Responses were coded: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree.

TABLE 2. Percentages for sex and personal involvement with competitive sports questions.

Variables	%
Sex	
Male	41.3
Female	58.7
	100%
	(N = 397)
Do you now or have you ever played competitive sports, besides in gym class?	
Yes	53.7
No	46.3
	100%
	(N = 397)
Do you have a close female family member who plays competitive sports?	
Yes	39.4
No	60.6
	100%
	(N = 396)

TABLE 3. Partial correlation coefficients for attention to sports media and attitudes toward women's sports.

Variables correlated with attitudes toward women's sports	Control variables	Zero-order correlation coefficient	Partial correlation coefficient
"Women's sports are not as important as men's sports."			
Attention to sports media*		–.04	
	Sex		–.08
	Education		–.04
	Income		–.02
	Sex, education		–.08
	Sex, income		–.07
	Education, income		–.02
	Sex, education, income		–.07
"Women's sports are not exciting."			
Attention to sports media*		–.11[a]	
	Sex		–.10[a]
	Education		–.11[a]
	Income		–.10[a]
	Sex, education		–.10[a]
	Sex, income		–.09
	Education, income		–.10[a]
	Sex, education, income		–.09[a]
"Women don't enjoy sports competition."			
Attention to sports media*		.07	
	Sex		.06
	Education		.07
	Income		.07
	Sex, education		.06
	Sex, income		.05
	Education, income		.07
	Sex, education, income		.06
"Women are not good athletes."			
Attention to sports media*		–.02	
	Sex		–.01
	Education		–.02
	Income		–.02
	Sex, education		–.01
	Sex, income		–.02
	Education, income		–.02
	Sex, education, income		–.02

*Responses were coded from 0 to 21.

[a] $p < .05$

TABLE 4. Three-Way Analysis of Variance of attention to sports media and personal experience with competitive sports on attitudes toward women's sports, specifically whether women's sports are as important as men's sports.

	Women's sports are not as important as men's.			
Main effects and interactions	Means	Std. Devs.	F	sig
Main effect of attention to sports media			.03	ns
Low	3.42	.01		
Medium	3.40	–.02		
High	3.43	.01		
Main effect of having played sports			.18	ns
Yes	3.40	.03		
No	3.44	–.02		
Main effect of having a close female family member who plays sports			.10	ns
Yes	3.45	–.02		
No	3.40	.02		
Interaction between attention to sports media and having played sports			2.12	ns
Low and yes	3.55			
Low and no	3.32			
Medium and yes	3.42			
Medium and no	3.38			
High and yes	3.28			
High and no	3.74			
Interaction between attention to sports media and having a female family member who plays competitive sports			.05	ns
Low and yes	3.52			
Low and no	3.38			
Medium and yes	3.49			
Medium and no	3.33			
High and yes	3.38			
High and no	3.47			
Three-way interactions between attention to sports media, having played sports, and having a female family member who plays sports			.02	ns
Low, yes, yes	3.50			
Low, no, yes	3.55			
Low, yes, no	3.59			
Low, no, no	3.25			
Medium, yes, yes	3.41			
Medium, no, yes	3.64			
Medium, yes, no	3.43			
Medium, no, no	3.28			
High, yes, yes	3.23			
High, no, yes	3.86			
High, yes, no	3.33			
High, no, no	3.68			

TABLE 5. Three-Way Analysis of Variance of attention to sports media and personal experience with competitive sports on attitudes toward women's sports.

	Women's sports are not exciting.			
Main effects and interactions	Means	Std. Devs.	F	sig
Main effect of attention to sports media			1.43	ns
Low	3.90	.11		
Medium	3.76	–.04		
High	3.71	.09		
Main effect of having played competitive sports			.50	ns
Yes	3.75	–.04		
No	3.84	.05		
Main effect of having a close female family member who plays competitive sports			.39	ns
Yes	3.81	.01		
No	3.78	–.01		
Interaction between attention to sports media and having played sports			.24	ns
Low and yes	3.86			
Low and no	3.94			
Medium and yes	3.69			
Medium and no	3.82			
High and yes	3.71			
High and no	3.69			
Interaction between attention to sports media and having a female family member who plays sports			.05	ns
Low and yes	4.05			
Low and no	3.84			
Medium and yes	3.73			
Medium and no	3.77			
High and yes	3.69			
High and no	3.72			
Three-way interactions between attention to sports media, having played sports, and having a female family member who plays sports			3.28	$p < .05$
Low, yes, yes	4.04			
Low, no, yes	4.05			
Low, yes, no	3.74			
Low, no, no	3.90			
Medium, yes, yes	3.78			
Medium, no, yes	3.64			
Medium, yes, no	3.57			
Medium, no, no	3.89			
High, yes, yes	3.57			
High, no, yes	4.07			
High, yes, no	3.88			
High, no, no	3.50			

TABLE 6. Three-Way Analysis of Variance of attention to sports media and personal experience with competitive sports on attitudes toward women's sports, specifically whether women enjoy athletic competition.

	Women don't enjoy athletic competition.			
Main effects and interactions	Means	Std. Devs.	F	sig
Main effect of attention to sports media			1.72	ns
Low	3.80	-.02		
Medium	3.69	-.13		
High	3.94	.12		
Main effect of having played competitive sports			.03	ns
Yes	3.85	.00		
No	3.80	.00		
Main effect of having a close female family member who plays competitive sports			.03	ns
Yes	3.82	.02		
No	3.83	-.02		
Interaction between attention to sports media and having played competitive sports			.04	ns
Low and yes	3.82			
Low and no	3.79			
Medium and yes	3.72			
Medium and no	3.67			
High and yes	3.93			
High and no	3.98			
Interaction between attention to sports media and having a female family member who plays sports			1.03	ns
Low and yes	3.91			
Low and no	3.75			
Medium and yes	3.68			
Medium and no	3.70			
High and yes	3.85			
High and no	4.03			
Three-way interactions between attention to sports media, having played sports, and having a female family member who plays sports			1.11	ns
Low, yes, yes	4.04			
Low, no, yes	3.75			
Low, yes, no	3.68			
Low, no, no	3.80			
Medium, yes, yes	3.78			
Medium, no, yes	3.50			
Medium, yes, no	3.65			
Medium, no, no	3.74			
High, yes, yes	3.80			
High, no, yes	4.00			
High, yes, no	4.08			
High, no, no	3.96			

TABLE 7. Three-Way Analysis of Variance of attention to sports media and personal experience with competitive sports on attitudes toward women's sports, specifically whether women enjoy athletic competition.

	Women are not good athletes.			
Main effects and interactions	Means	Std. Devs.	F	sig
Main effect of attention to sports media			.11	ns
Low	4.02	.00		
Medium	3.98	-.04		
High	4.05	.03		
Main effect of having played competitive sports			1.83	ns
Yes	4.08	-.04		
No	3.96	.03		
Main effect of having a close female family member who plays competitive sports			1.06	ns
Yes	3.98	.05		
No	4.05	-.06		
Interaction between attention to sports media and having played competitive sports			1.30	ns
Low and yes	4.06			
Low and no	3.99			
Medium and yes	4.13			
Medium and no	3.84			
High and yes	4.06			
High and no	4.05			
Interaction between attention to sports media and having a female family member who plays sports			1.49	ns
Low and yes	4.07			
Low and no	4.00			
Medium and yes	3.83			
Medium and no	4.09			
High and yes	4.02			
High and no	4.09			
Three-way interactions between attention to sports media, having played sports, and having a female family member who plays sports			.09	ns
Low, yes, yes	4.00			
Low, no, yes	4.15			
Low, yes, no	4.10			
Low, no, no	3.93			
Medium, yes, yes	3.89			
Medium, no, yes	3.71			
Medium, yes, no	4.43			
Medium, no, no	3.89			
High, yes, yes	4.00			
High, no, yes	4.07			
High, yes, no	4.13			
High, no, no	4.04			

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Trusting the Media and 'Joe from Dubuque' Online: Comparing Internet and Traditional Sources on Media Credibility Measures

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Paper submitted for consideration to the Mass Communication & Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Chicago, July 30-Aug. 2, 1997.

Trusting the Media and 'Joe from Dubuque' Online: Comparing Internet and Traditional Sources on Media Credibility Measures

Introduction

A campaign analyst, while discussing how the Internet is used to reach voters, fretted about whether the public would trust information on the Internet when 'Joe from Dubuque' can create a Web page that appears as credible as one posted by the news media.[1]

But in the face of declining confidence in the media— a 1997 Roper poll shows that more people trust everything they hear from a lawyer or a Congressman (3%) than from a newspaper reporter (2%)[2]—a more pertinent question is how much do people trust the *New York Times* online? Credibility is crucial if the public is going to continue to embrace and accept the Internet. If people do not trust or believe what they see or hear in the traditional media or from online media sources, they are less likely to pay attention to it.[3] Lack of trust in information obtained from the Web could keep it from becoming a major source of news in the immediate future.

While numerous studies have examined demographic characteristics of those who travel the Information Superhighway,[4] far less attention has been paid to the degree to which people trust the information they find there. This study surveyed politically-interested Web users online to examine whether they view Internet publications as credible as their traditionally-delivered counterparts and which demographic characteristics determine credibility. More specifically, this study compares online newspapers, television, news magazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sources to their traditionally-delivered versions in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth. This study also explores the degree to which credibility of a medium correlates with amount of reliance on it as well as the degree to which credibility is related to age, gender income and levels of education.

Literature Review

Media Credibility

Widespread concern that the public's confidence in the media had dropped spurred a host of studies in the mid-to-late 1980s examining media credibility.[5] However, after studies suggested that the credibility crisis itself lacked credibility—that is, the public had a largely favorable impression of the media[6]—attention shifted away from media credibility to source and message credibility.[7] But media credibility deserves renewed attention for at least two reasons. First, credibility levels have dropped considerably during the 1990s to the point where it could be said to have reached crisis proportions. For instance, a 1996 National Opinion Research Center Poll showed that the percentage of those who had a great deal of faith in the press has declined from 18 to 11 percent from 1986 to 1996 and the numbers of those who had at least some confidence in the media dropped from 72 percent to 59 percent over the same time period.[8] Similarly, while a study by the Pew Charitable Trust found that a solid majority of the public still views the three networks as credible (72% to 74%), believability ratings are 10 points lower than a decade before.[9] Finally, a 1997 Roper study found out that while almost eight out of 10 (78%) said that the source they rely on most delivers high-quality information, less than half (47%) thought the media in general were doing a good job. Also, from 1985 to 1997 the number of individuals who judged negativity, bias and being manipulated by special interests as major problems in media coverage increased.[10] Second, most of the earlier credibility studies were conducted before the emergence of several new media, most notably the Internet. Credibility levels of these new alternative forms of information have not been adequately assessed.

Indeed, only a few studies have examined the credibility of Internet information. Brady showed 134 graduate and undergraduate students a Web page he created containing information on candidates running for Congress and asked them to judge whether the information on the Web page was more or less in-depth and biased than similar televised information. Almost three-quarters (71%) judged the Web page more in-depth than television. While a slight majority (54.5%) said the Web page was just as biased as television, 43.3 percent said it was less biased.[11] Similarly, a study by the Pew Research Center also found that online users judged the Internet as a credible source. A majority (56%) agreed that "these days you're more likely to find accurate information about what's going on from the Internet than in the daily newspapers or on the network news," while only 22 percent concurred that "a lot of what you find on the Internet cannot be believed."[12] On the other hand, a Roper study for the Freedom Forum found that people rated leading traditional sources more fair and unbiased than Internet information. While three-quarters claimed they trust CNN and six in 10 had confidence in the *New York Times*, slightly more than half (54%) of those surveyed trusted the Internet to deliver fair and unbiased information about the presidential campaign. However, people put more faith in the Internet than in their local newspapers (52%).[13]

While evidence remains scarce on whether individuals perceive the Internet to be credible, several analysts have examined whether Internet information *should* be judged as trustworthy as traditional sources. Several observers have noted that an assumed strength of the Internet—that it is a freewheeling, unregulated outpost for anyone to express his or her opinions—might also weaken its value as a credible information source. While traditional news sources are subject to both professional and social pressures to provide accurate and unbiased information; Web sites posted by 'Joe from Dubuque' are not subject to such constraints.[14] Worse, several parody sites have cropped up on the Internet which look like ones posted by official sources. This may mislead viewers, especially Web novices, into believing they are visiting official sites. For instance, during the 1996 presidential election, those looking for the Bob Dole home page may have stumbled upon a parody site that had the Dole fruit company logo emblazoned upon it and touted him as the "ripe man for the job."[15]

Messages from usenet and other discussion forums may be judged even less believable than Web sites. Research on source credibility suggests that individuals use several standards in judging a source's believability, including the sources' expertise and bias as well as the audience members' prior knowledge and impressions of a source. When knowledge of the source's credibility is limited, individuals examine the message to see if it is well presented, believable and with specifics or supporting data.[16] Studies suggest that few of these standards are met in online discussions. Franke[17] found in a content analysis of political discussions on the Net that most messages were too brief or strange to be considered serious dialogue. Most of the messages reflected users' "pre-established partisan views" and a majority were significantly sarcastic in tone.

Credibility and Demographics

Several studies have examined whether demographics influence judgments of media credibility. Some of the results of these studies can be applied to the Internet. For instance, past studies suggest that males, and those with high levels of education, income and media use tend to be the most critical of the media in general.[18] Internet studies suggest while the Information Superhighway is becoming more demographically mainstream,[19] it is still dominated by white males of high socioeconomic status.[20] Researchers also suggest that Internet users tend to be heavy media users in general, although the Internet has not yet replaced more traditional sources.[21] Rather, those who rely on the Internet for political information tend to be "political junkies" who watch CNN, Sunday public affairs programs and C-SPAN as well as read more news magazines and political books than the average individual.[22] Therefore, several demographic characteristics associated with high use of the Internet are also related to negative perceptions of credibility.

On the other hand, some demographic variables are associated with positive perceptions of Internet credibility. Two characteristics associated with high levels of media credibility are also associated with heavy Internet use: age and political ideology. Past studies suggest that young adults are the most likely to judge the media as credible [23] and are the most likely to use the Internet, although older individuals are beginning to enter cyberspace in greater numbers.[24] Similarly, liberals are more likely than conservatives to judge the media as credible and to support freedom of press issues.[25] While studies suggest that Democrats and Republicans use the Internet in about equal proportions[26] and that at least a quarter of Web users are Libertarian,[27] the number of Web users who identify themselves as liberals outnumber those who consider themselves as conservatives.[28]

Credibility and Reliance

Finally, past studies suggest that how credible one views a medium is strongly related to how often one relies on it.[29] Therefore, most studies find that television, the most relied upon source. is also judged the most credible.[30] Recent studies estimate the number of those who use the Internet as between 26.4 and 37 million people, less than 20 percent of the adult population.[31] These statistics, however, only measure those who have visited cyberspace, not the number of users who rely on it for news and information. Studies conducted during the 1996 presidential election found that about 12 percent of voting age Americans used the Internet for political news and three percent listed it as their primary source of information.[32] With so few people relying on the Internet for political information, it is doubtful whether the general population would judge it as credible as more traditional sources. However, as the study by the Pew Research Center of online users suggests, those who rely on the Internet for political news and information might judge it just as, or more, credible than traditional news sources.

Research Questions

This study of the credibility of online sources examines four main questions:

1. To what degree will individuals judge online newspapers, television news, news magazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sources as believable, fair, accurate and in-depth?

2. How do online newspapers, television, news magazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sources compare with their traditionally-delivered versions in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth?

3a: How does reliance on online media compare with reliance on their traditional counterparts in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth?

3b: Is reliance on an online source a better predictor of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth than use measures?

4. To what degree is believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of the online sources correlated with age, gender, income and educational levels?

Method

This study is based on an online survey designed to attract politically-interested Web users. The survey was posted on the World Wide Web during the two weeks before and the two weeks after the 1996 presidential election (October 23-November 20, 1996). Additionally, links were established to the survey from other politically-oriented Web sites and notices were sent to media and politically-oriented discussion groups, forums, usenet groups and listservs informing them of the survey. The intent was not to generate a random sample,[33] but to attract politically-interested Web users—those who would be more likely to use online media sources. A total of 308 individuals completed the survey during the four-week period.

Media credibility has been measured several ways, and studies suggest that how credibility is measured influences the degree to which individuals judge the media as credible.[34] Believability, accuracy, bias and depth or completeness are four measures that have consistently emerged from several past studies that have examined how media credibility should be gauged.[35]

For this survey, respondents were asked to compare traditionally delivered and online media in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of political information. The media examined were newspapers, TV news, news magazines, candidate literature and political issue-oriented sources. Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale the degree of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of each online and traditional source. The five-point scale ranged from not at all believable (fair, accurate or in-depth) to very believable (fair, accurate or in-depth), with a "don't know" option. This created 40 separate credibility measures (four for each of the five traditional and five online sources).

Research on traditional media suggest that credibility is strongly related to how often individuals use that particular medium.[36] Past studies also suggest that reliance is a stronger predictor of media credibility than general use measures.[37] This study employed three different measures of media use: average number of hours per week on the Web, the number of times the Internet has been accessed and the degree of reliance on the Web. The two different media use measures (hours a week and times accessing the Web) were open-ended. Respondents were also asked to judge on a five-point Likert scale "How much do you rely on the following sources (television news, newspapers, news magazines, radio and the World Wide Web) for your political information?" Responses ranged from "don't rely at all" to "heavily rely on."

Past studies suggest that those who are older and have high levels of income and education are the least likely to view the media as credible, and males judge the media as less credible than females.[38] Therefore, this study also employed traditional measures of age, gender, income and education[39] to see if relationships between credibility and demographics found for traditionally-delivered media hold true for their online counterparts.

The data were analyzed in four stages:

First, frequencies were run to determine how believable, fair, accurate and in-depth the respondents judged online sources. However, a large number of "don't knows" for the online television news variable necessitated recoding to eliminate those responses in order to better compare each online media on the four credibility factors.

Second, paired t-tests were calculated to compare each of the online media with its traditionally-delivered counterpart on the four credibility measures. Again, "don't know" responses were excluded to compare responses only from those who stated an opinion concerning the differences between online and traditionally- delivered media.

Third, correlations were run between the two media use measures and credibility of online newspapers, TV news sources, online news magazines, online candidate literature and online issue sources to determine whether the amount of Internet use influences whether individuals judge the Web to be credible. Similarly, reliance on traditional sources and the World Wide Web was correlated with credibility measures both to ascertain whether reliance influences credibility and to determine if reliance is more strongly related to perceptions of Web credibility than Internet use.

Finally, correlational analysis between the online media variables and age, gender, education and income is used to determine whether the relationships found for traditional media will also appear for online media in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth.

Results

This study examines 308 responses to an online survey assessing Web users perceptions of credibility of online political information sources. Almost three-quarters (72.6%) of the respondents indicate a strong interest in the 1996 presidential campaign, and almost as many (70.8%) are very interested in politics in general. Respondents spend an average of 13.2 hours per week on the Web; three of those hours are spent seeking online political information. Overall, three-quarters (75.5%) of the respondents browse the Web between 10-20 hours per week on average. The respondents are an experienced group of users who have accessed the Web an average of 1,723 times, including 11 people who said they have accessed the Internet more than 10,000 times.

Additionally, the gender ratio is 75.5% male and 24.5% female. The respondents range from 17 - 76 years of age (M=31.2), and almost nine out of ten (88.3%) are white. Six out of ten have a college degree or higher and slightly less than half (45.1%) report an annual income between $25,001-$65,000.

Credibility of Online Sources

Anyone with access to a server can post information on the Web without restriction, calling the Web's credibility into question. The degree to which individuals judge online sources as believable, fair, accurate and in-depth is the focus of this study's first research question.

Overall, most respondents only judged online media as "somewhat" credible, with scores generally highest on the believability measures (Table 1). Compared to other online information sources, online political issue-oriented sites are deemed the most believable, accurate and in-depth, and online news magazines the most fair. Online candidate literature was judged "not at all" and "not very" believable, fair, accurate or in-depth by most of the respondents.

Online Political Issue-Oriented Sources: Though online sources that post political issue information are generally considered "somewhat" credible, they are considered more believable, fair, accurate and in-depth than any of the other sources examined. Also, half (50.7%) of those responding marked these Web sources as being moderately to very in-depth.

Online Candidate Literature: Candidate information posted online by political entities is seen as the least believable, fair, accurate or in-depth source by almost six out of ten (58.2%) respondents. Only 7.7 percent indicated that online candidate literature was moderately to very credible.

TV News Sources, Newspapers, and News Magazines Online: Respondents generally perceive these three information sources as "somewhat" believable, fair, accurate and in-depth, though online TV news was viewed as the least credible of the three. Online TV news was judged "not at all" or "not very" credible by nearly twice as many people as were online newspapers and online news magazines. However, only about half of the respondents registered an opinion concerning online TV news source credibility; the remainder answered "don't know" (Table 1).

Traditional information sources are generally heavily scrutinized for accurate and unbiased reporting, while Internet sources are not subject to these same pressures. The Internet's unregulated flow of information may cause many people to question its credibility. Studies probing credibility report mixed results; some claim that online sources are more credible than their traditionally-delivered counterparts, while others have concluded the opposite. Therefore, paired sample t-tests were run to compare traditional sources to the Internet versions in terms of believability, fairness, bias and depth.

Generally, neither traditional nor online sources are rated much above "somewhat" credible. However, online sources are consistently judged as more credible than their traditional counterparts. The only exception is news magazines whose mean depth score was significantly higher than the rating for online news magazines (Table 2).

Newspapers and Online Newspapers: Respondents judged online newspapers as significantly more fair, accurate and in-depth than non-electronic newspapers. There is no difference between the mean believability scores of online and printed newspapers.

TV News and Online TV News Sources: Online television news sources are considered significantly more believable, fair, accurate and in-depth than their broadcast counterparts. Across all four credibility items, Web users trust online TV sources more than non-online ones.

News Magazines and Online News Magazines: Online news magazines are seen as significantly more fair in their coverage than traditionally-delivered ones. However, printed news magazines are rated significantly more in-depth than the online versions. Neither the traditional nor online versions of news magazines registered any differences in their levels of believability or accuracy.

Candidate Literature and Online Candidate Literature: Online candidate literature is considered significantly more believable, fair, accurate, and in-depth than non-Internet versions, though this type of information is generally not rated as very credible regardless of how it is delivered.

Political Issue-oriented Sources and Online Political Issue-oriented Sources: There is no significant difference in any of the credibility items between political issue information delivered traditionally or on the Web. This source category rates the highest on all four credibility items, indicating respondents put credence into this type of information regardless of whether traditionally delivered or on the Web (see Table 2).

Studies indicate that the more credible the public finds a particular medium the more they rely on it as their primary news source. Therefore, the most relied upon sources are deemed the most credible. Relationships between reliance on the Web and judgments of credibility are examined next, as are comparisons between use and reliance in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth.

This analysis also found significant relationships between reliance on traditional media and all four credibility items. There is a strong correlation between reliance on traditionally-delivered media and perceptions of credibility with all significant at the .001 level. The more users rely on traditional media the more those media are considered believable, fair, accurate and in-depth (Table 3).

Reliance on the Web tends to be significantly related to credibility assessments of online sources with 14 out of 20 relationships significant. However, none of the scores for the online media were as high as the traditional ones. For reliance on traditional media, scores were highest for believability. For online sources, scores were highest for depth.

Reliance is a much stronger measure of credibility than use of the Web. Only one of the 40 possible relationships for use was significant. In about half the cases the amount of online use tended to be negatively related to levels of credibility (Table 4).

Reliance on the Web and Online Candidate Literature and Online Political Issue Sites: All four credibility items are significantly associated with degree of reliance on the Web for both information sources, though the strength of these associations is weak. Fairness of online political issue sites have a stronger relationship to Web reliance ($r^2 = .073$) than any other variable across all of the sources examined. Overall, credibility measures of online political issues sites are more strongly related to Web reliance than any of the other online information sources studied.

Reliance on the Web and Online Newspapers and News Magazines: Significant relationships were discovered between reliance on the Web and believability and depth of online newspapers and news magazines. Additionally, news magazines are significantly related to perceptions of fairness. Though the correlations between the reliance on the Internet and the credibility of online newspapers and news magazines are significant, the strength of these associations are not very strong

Reliance on the Web and Online TV News Sources: The only significant association between online TV news sources and reliance is on the depth item. The more respondents rely on online TV news sources the more in-depth they judge these sources to be. The strength of association, r^2=.067, is weak by many standards but is the second strongest found among the Web reliance variables in this analysis (see Table 3).

Number of Times Accessed and Hours per Week on the Web: The number of times the Web has been accessed and the number of hours individuals spend on the Web do not seem to influence perceptions of credibility. Believability of online news magazines was the only credibility item associated with Internet experience. As the average number of hours spent on the Web per week increases so does believability of online news magazines. The Web as a new medium is still in its infancy, thus experience may not yet be a factor when judging the credibility of online sources (refer to Table 4).

While studies indicate the Internet is becoming more demographically diverse, it is still dominated by white males of higher socioeconomic status, a group least likely to assess the media as credible. On the other hand, studies indicate young adults are most likely to perceive the media as credible. The last research question probes the relationships between several demographic variables and judgments of online source credibility.

This study finds that demographics are poor predictors of online credibility. Education is the strongest predictor, but only 11 out of 20 relationships are significant. In all other cases, fewer than half of the relationships are significant (Table 4).

Gender: Generally, females view the Web as more credible and trustworthy than males. Gender is significantly associated with perceptions of depth in four out of five online sources, and three out of five accuracy measures. Women also judge online newspapers and news magazines as more believable. Perceptions of fairness are not associated with gender.

Age: Age is not strongly related to credibility judgments as only seven of 20 relationships are significant. Significant negative correlations indicate that as age increases, respondents perceive online newspapers, news magazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sites to be less in-depth. Age is also significantly associated with accuracy of online newspapers and accuracy and believability of information posted on online news magazines, but in no case is age significantly associated with judgments of fairness.

Education: Education is the strongest predictor of online credibility although only 11 out of 20 relationships are significant and none are very strong. Education is negatively associated with perceptions of online source credibility. Significant associations are found across all four credibility items for online candidate literature and political issue-oriented sites, indicating that those who are better educated tend to view online political information as less credible.

Income: Those with higher incomes tend to view online media sources as less credible with eight out of 20 relationships significant. Online candidate literature is viewed as less credible as respondents' income increases. Economic status is also negatively related to perceptions of depth of online newspapers, news magazines, issue-oriented information as well as with the accuracy of online newspapers.

While online issue-oriented sources are significantly associated with education, this is not the case with income. Even though high income is generally associated with higher levels of education, apparently increased income has little bearing on perceptions of online credibility.

Discussion

This study employed an online survey of politically-interested Web users to examine whether people view online publications as credible as their traditionally-delivered counterparts in the face of studies that suggest that trust in the media is declining. Credibility is a crucial issue for the Internet because past research suggests that people are less likely to pay attention to media they do not perceive as credible.

This study found that online information is judged as more credible than news from traditionally-delivered sources, though neither are judged as very credible. Mean scores are higher for all online information source measures than their traditional versions except for depth of information in magazines.

The majority of respondents judge online media and political issue-oriented publications as somewhat credible, while online candidate literature is perceived as not at all or not very credible. Traditionally-delivered media follow the same trend, though mean scores are somewhat lower. This study, then, offers some support to polls that suggest the media are suffering from a crisis in credibility. However, it should be noted that while other studies look at the general population, this one is limited to those who use the Web for political information. Some analysts suggest that "netizens" are generally distrustful and disconnected from the government and other major institutions.[40] Indeed, studies of Internet users suggest that they are distrustful of government[41] and generally are not very interested in politics.[42] Thus, the low credibility scores may result, in part, because Internet users have lower trust of major institutions than the general public.

Respondents do not judge each media as equally credible. For instance, scores were highest for issue-oriented sources and lowest for candidate literature. The low scores for candidate literature are hardly surprising as both candidate flyers and Web sites may be viewed as propaganda. Past studies suggest that people view television as the most credible medium. However, this study shows that television-related Web sites scored lower in credibility than online newspapers and news magazines. The Web is not currently as visually sophisticated or compelling as television. Perhaps television scored lower than the online newspapers and magazines because this survey was conducted among Internet users and the Web is still largely a text-based medium.

Past studies suggest that a medium's credibility is strongly related to the degree to which people rely on it. Indeed, in this study reliance is linked to credibility, particularly for traditional sources where all correlations are significant at the .001 level. However, correlations for online sources are weaker than for traditionally-delivered ones, even though the Web users indicate they rely more on Internet sources and judge them as more credible than the traditional ones.

This study discovered that reliance on the Web is a stronger predictor of credibility than amount of use. These findings support earlier research which also found that amount of use is not a strong predictor of credibility among traditionally-delivered media. Rimmer and Weaver[43] suggest that reliance measures should be more strongly linked to media credibility than use because media use taps behaviors while reliance measures examine attitudes toward individual media. For this study, reliance may have produced stronger correlations than Web use because those measures examined reliance upon the Web for political information while the use measures simply gauged time spent on the Internet. Finally, the Web is an emerging medium, thus levels of experience may not yet influence judgments of credibility.

Previous studies of traditional media have found those who are older, male and of high socioeconomic status tend to be the most critical of the media; this study found an identical pattern. The young are the heaviest users of the Internet, which may contribute to their higher credibility scores. But while Internet use is highest among those who are male and have a high income and education, such users are less likely to view the media as credible. However, demographic variables in general were not very strong predictors of online media use; education was the strongest predictor though just over half of the relationships were significant. Fewer than half of the relationships were significant for the other demographic measures.

Past research suggests that whether the media is judged as credible may depend on how the variable is measured. Indeed scores in the current study are generally higher for the believability measures than the other credibility items, although differences between the various credibility variables are not great. Also, the differences between believability of traditional and online sources tend to be smaller than for other credibility measures. Surprisingly, those surveyed did not give the Internet sources high marks for depth, although those who relied heavily on online media tend to judge these pages as more in-depth. One advantage of the Internet is while traditional information sources have limited time and space to work with, the news-hole for online sources is theoretically limitless. Online versions of publications often include articles that could not find room in their traditional counterparts or include longer versions of articles than appeared in the traditionally-delivered publication. However, as a practical matter, online editors have found that Web users do not like to scroll down several screens to read an entire story, which provides a powerful incentive to keep articles short.

This study examined media credibility among those who regularly use the Internet. Future studies could be conducted among the general population to determine the degree to which the Internet is viewed as credible and whether it is indeed judged as more trustworthy than traditionally-delivered counterparts.

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1. Phil Noble, "Net the Vote," *Campaigns & Elections*, July 1996, 27-33. The authors will be using the terms "Internet " and the "Web" interchangeably throughout the article for the sake of variety , although they are aware that the World Wide Web is only a portion of the larger Internet.

2. "News Junkies, News Critics, " study conducted by the Roper Center, January 1997. URL: http://www.newseum.org

3. Cecilie Gaziano, "How Credible is the Credibility Crisis?" *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (Summer 1988): 267-278).

4. For instance, see Jupiter Communications, "1997 Consumer Internet Report." URL: http://www.jup.com/research/reports/consumer.shtml; CommerceNet and Neilsen Research, "The CommerceNet/Neilsen Internet Demographics Survey: Executive Summary, " url: http:// www.commerce.net/information/surveys; D.L. Hoffman, W.D. Kalsbeek and T. P. Novak, "Internet Use on the United States: 1995 Baselines for Commercial Development." URL: http// www2000.orgsm.vanderbilt.edu/baseline/1995.Internet.estimates.html; J. McGavey, "Latest Net Study: 9.5 Million Active Surfers," *Inter@active Week*, January 1996, p. 9; MIDS, "Third MIDS Internet Demographic Survey, Matrix Information and Directory Services, Austin, TX. URL: http://www3.mids.org/ids3/pr9510.html.

5. American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Newspaper Credibility: Building Reader Trust*, conducted by MORI Research Inc., 1985; Times Mirror, *The People & the Press.:A Time Mirror Investigation of Public Attitudes Toward the News Media* , conducted by Gallup in collaboration with Michael J. Robinson (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Company, 1986); *The People and the Press: Part 5*, conducted by the Gallup Organization (Washington, D.C.: Times Mirror Company, 1989); *The People and the Press: Part 3* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Company, 1987); D. Charles Whitney, *The Media and the People: Soundings from Two Communities* (New York: Gannett Center for Media Studies, Columbia University, 1985); David Shaw, "Public and the Press—Two Viewpoints," *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1985, pp. 1, 12-13; Associated Press Managing Editors Association, *Journalists and Readers: Bridging the Credibility Gap*, conducted by MORI Research, Inc. (San Bernardino, CA: The Sun, October 1985); William Schneider and I.A. Lewis, "Views on the News," *Public Opinion*, August-September 1985, pp. 6-11, 58-59; Ralph S. Izard, "Public Confidence in the News Media," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (Spring 1985): 247-255..

6. Gaziano, "How Credible is the Credibility Crisis?"; Times Mirror, *The People & the Press*, 1986.

7. For instance, see Michael D. Slater and Donna Rouner, "How Message Evaluation and Source Attributes May Influence Credibility Assessment and Belief Change," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73 (Winter 1996): 974-991: Erica Weintraub Austin and Qingwen Dong, "Source v. Content Effects on Judgments of News Believability," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (Winter 1994): 973-983; Keith Stamm and Ric Dube, "The Relationship of Attitudinal Components to Trust in Media," *Communication Research* 21 (February 1994): 105-123; Albert Gunther, "Attitude Extremity and Trust in Media," *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (Summer 1988): 279-287.

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8. "Political Institutions, the Press, and Education Show Big Declines," *The Public Perspective*, February/March 1997, p. 4.

9. "TV News Viewership Declines: Network TV News Credibility Slips," study by Princeton Survey Research Associates, April 19-25, 1996, URL: http://www.people-press.org.

10. The 1997 Roper Study ("News Junkies, News Critics") found that 63 percent said negative coverage was a major problem, while 52 percent said bias and 63 percent said bowing to special interests were serious problems. The 1995 Times Mirror study (*People and the Press: Part 5*)found 60 percent said the media paid too much attention to bad news, 53 percent said the media tend to favor one side in dealing with social and political issues and an equal percentage said the media are often influenced by powerful people and organizations.

11. Dwight J. Brady, "Cyberdemocracy and Perceptions of Politics: An Experimental Analysis of Political Communication on the World Wide Web." Paper presented to the annual Conference of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, November 1996.

12. "One-in-Ten Voters Online for Campaign '96." Pew Research Center Survey of Technology, October 21-31, 1996, URL: http://www.people-press.org.

13. John W. Mashek with Lawrence T. McGill and Adam Clayton Powell, *Lethargy '96: How the Media Covered a Listless Campaign* (New York: Media Studies Center, 1997).

It should be noted, however, that these responses were among those who used the medium and felt comfortable enough to rate it on fairness and bias. Roper found that 70 percent did not use the Internet and another 16 percent did not know if it was fair and unbiased. Therefore, the 54 percent fairness rating was based on the 14 percent of the survey who used the Internet and expressed an opinion on it.

14. Paul Starobin, "On the Square," *National Journal*, May 25, 1996, pp. 1145-1149; Andrew Calabrese and Mark Borchert, "Prospects for Electronic Democracy in the United States: Rethinking Communication and Social Policy," *Media, Culture and Society* 18 (1996): 248-268.

15. Frank Houston, "The Virtual Trail," *Columbia Journalism Review, January/February 1996, pp. 26-28; Pam Greenberg, "Political Possibilities," State Legislatures*, 19-23.

16. Slater and Rouner, "Message Evaluation and Source Attributes;" Austin and Dong, "Source v. Content Effects.

17. Gordon Franke, Participatory Political Discussion on the Internet," *Votes and Opinions* 2 (July/August 1996): 22-25.

18. Ronald Mulder, "A Log-Linear Analysis of Media Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 58 (Winter 1981): 635-638; American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Newspaper Credibility;* Times Mirror, *The People & the Press*; Whitney, *The Media and the People*.

19. Hoffman, Kalsbeek and Lovak, "Internet and Web Use."

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20. Guido H. Stempel III and Thomas Hargrove, "Mass Media Audiences in a Changing Media Environment," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73 (Autumn 1996):549-558; Georgia Institute of Technology's Graphic, Visualization and Usability Center, "GVU's Sixth WWW User Survey," URL: http:// www.cc.gatech.edu/gvu/user_surveys/papers/9610-release.html; David S. Birdsell, Douglas Muzzio, Humphrey Taylor and David Krane, "A New Political Marketplace: The Web Snares Voters," *The Public Perspective*, June/July 1996, pp. 33; "Who's Surfing the Net?", surveys by Hart & Teeter for NBC/*Wall Street Journal*, 1996 and Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Pew Research Center, April 19-25, 1996, *The Public Perspective*, June/July 1996.

21. Rebekah V. Bromley and Dorothy Bowles, "Impact of Internet on Use of Traditional Media," *Newspaper Research Journal* 16 (Spring 1995): 14-27; Barbara Kaye, "Uses and Gratifications of the World Wide Web," presented at the annual meeting of the AEJMC, Anaheim, CA, August 1996; GVU, "GVU's Sixth WWW User Survey.
Studies by the Pew Charitable Trust ("TV News Viewership Declines" do suggest however, that using the Internet has cut in to television news viewing.

22. "Cybercampaigns Preach to the Choir," *Media and Campaigns 96 Briefing No. 1* (New York: Media Studies Center, 1996) 8-10.

23. Bruce Westley and Werner Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 41 (Summer 1964): 325-35; Richard F. Carter and Bradley S. Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television: Which Do You Believe?," *Journalism Quarterly* 42 (Winter 1965): 22-34; Bradley Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability: Some Multiple Correlates," *Journalism Quarterly* 4 3 (Winter 1966): 665-70; *People and the Press: Part 3*; Mulder, "Log-Linear Analysis. "
The survey for the Pew Research Center ("TV News Viewership Declines"), however, indicates that declines in news credibility ratings were highest among young adults.

24. Stempel and Hargrove, "Mass Media Audiences;" GVU, "GVU's Sixth WWW User Survey," Birdsell, Muzzio, Taylor and Krane, "A New Political Marketplace: "survey by Hart & Teeter for NBC/Wall Street Journal, 1996; "Who's Surfing the Net," *The Public Perspective*.

25. Thomas J. Johnson, "Exploring Media Credibility: How Media and Nonmedia Workers Judged Media Performance in Iran/Contra," *Journalism Quarterly* 70 (Spring 1993): 87-97; Cecilie Gaziano, "News People's Ideology and the Credibility Debate," *Newspaper Research Journal* 9 (Fall 1987): 1-18.

26. "Who's Surfing the Net."
Our study also suggests that there were an equal proportion of Republicans (32 percent) and Democrats (34 percent).

27. GVU, "GVU's Sixth WWW User Survey."

28. Douglas Muzzio and David Birdsell, "The 1996 'Net Voter," *The Public Perspective*, December/January 1997; GVU, "GVU's Sixth WWW User Survey."

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29. Wayne Wanta and Yu-Wei Hu, "The Effects of Credibility, Reliance, and Exposure on Media Agenda-Setting: A Path Analysis Model." *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (Spring 1994): 90-98; Tony Rimmer and David Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers? Media Use and Media Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (Spring 1987): 28-36, 44; Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility;" Carter and Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television;" Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability;" American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Building Reader Trust*.

30. Burns W. Roper, *Changing Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media, 1959-1976* (New York: Television Information Office, 1977); Harvey K. Jacobson, "Mass Media Believability: A Study of Receiver Judgments," *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (Spring 1969): 20-28; Carter and Greenberg, "Which Do You Believe?" Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability;" Westley and Severin, Some Correlates of Media Credibility."

However, studies suggest that those who actively seek out information are more likely to see newspapers as credible (Ronald Mulder, "Media Credibility: A Uses-Gratifications Approach," *Journalism Quarterly* 57 (Autumn 1980): 474-477. Also, studies indicate that those who are highly educated, older and male tend to be more to judge newspapers as credible than younger, less educated females (Mulder, "Log-Linear Analysis;" Carter and Greenberg "Newspapers or Television" Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates;" Pew Charitable Trusts, "TV News Viewership Declines")

31. CommerceNet and Neilsen Research, "The CommerceNet/Neilsen Internet Demographics Survey: Executive Summary, " url: http:// www.commerce.net/information/surveys; D.L. Hoffman, W.D. Kalsbeek and T. P. Novak, "Internet Use on the United States: 1995 Baselines for Commercial Development." URL: http// www2000.orgsm.vanderbilt.edu/baseline/1995.Internet.estimates.html; J. McGavey, "Latest Net Study; 9.5 Million Active Surfers." *Inter@active Week*, January 1996, p. 9; MIDS, "Third MIDS Internet Demographic Survey, Matrix Information and Directory Services, Austin, TX. URL: http://www3.mids.org/ids3/pr9510.html.

32. "Campaign '96 Gets Lower Grades from Voters," survey by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Nov. 7-10, 1996.

33. The Internet poses a unique set of problems in guaranteeing a random sample of respondents. The Web has no central registry of users and email addresses to create a sampling frame. Response rates cannot be calculated because there is no way to know how many individuals may have seen the survey or its links, but refused to participate. Because participation is voluntary, those who choose to complete a cybersurvey may differ from those who choose not to participate. Voluntary participants may be be more interested, informed and concerned about the survey topic and typically hold viewpoints which are stronger and more extreme than other individuals. Thus, results may not be able to be generalized to the population (Barbara Kaye and Thomas J. Johnson, "Taming the Cyber Frontier: Techniques for Improving Online Surveys," submitted to the Mass Communication Division of the Speech Communication Association's annual convention, 1997; Wei Wu and David Weaver, "Online Democracy or Online Demagoguery--Public Opinion 'Polls' on the Internet," presented to the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research annual conference, Chicago, IL, November 1996.

34. Cecilie Gaziano and Kristin McGrath, "Measuring the Concept of Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 63 (August 1986): 451-462.

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35. Mark Douglas West, "Validating a Scale for the Measurement of Credibility: A Covariance Structure Modeling Approach," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (Spring 1994): 159-168; Philip Meyer, "Defining and Measuring Credibility of Newspapers: Developing an Index, *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (Fall 1988): 567-574, 588; Gaziano and McGrath, "Measuring the Concept of Credibility."

36. Wanta and Hu, "The Effects of Credibility;" Rimmer and Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers?"; Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility;" Carter and Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television;" Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability;" American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Building Reader Trust.*

37. Wanta and Hu, "Effects of Credibility;" Rimmer and Weaver, "Different Questions."

38. Mulder, "A Log-Linear Analysis;" American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Newspaper Credibility;* Times Mirror, *The People & the Press*; Whitney, *The Media and the People*Carter and Greenberg, "Which Do You Believe?" Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability," Westley and Severin, Some Correlates of Media Credibility."

39. Respondents were asked to record their age on their last birthday. They were also asked what is the highest grade or year in school they have completed (less than high school, high school grad, some college, four year college degree, master's degree, Ph.D. degree, other) and to estimate their annual income for 1996 (less than 10,000, 10,001-25,000, 25,0001-40,000, 40,001-65,000, 65,001 to 80,000, 80,001-95,000, more than 95,000).

40. John Perry Barlow, "The Powers That Were," *Wired*, September 1996, pp. 53-56, 196-199.

41. A majority of Internet users agreed that politicians never tell us what they really think and most disagree that leaders are devoted to public service. However, respondents did believe they had the power to influence government; efficacy scores were generally high (Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara Kaye, "The Internet: Vehicle for Engagement or a Haven for the Disaffected? In Thomas J. Johnson, Carol E. Hays and Scott P. Hays, *Engaging the Public: How the Government and Media Can Reinvigorate American Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, in press).

42. "One in Ten Voters Online."

43. Rimmer and Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers?"

Table 1

Perceptions of Credibility and Depth of Online Sources

	Believeability	Fairness	Accuracy	Depth
	Mean Scores as percentages			
Online Newspapers				
Not at all/not very...	16.5%	22.1%	15.5%	26.1%
Somewhat...	52.3	52.9	55.2	45.7
Moderately/very....	31.3	25.0	29.2	28.2
Online TV News Sources				
Not at all/not very...	32.0	37.6	34.4	52.9
Somewhat...	45.6	45.6	52.5	34.1
Moderately/very....	22.4	16.8	13.1	13.0
Online News Magazines				
Not at all/not very...	12.5	22.4	16.5	28.9
Somewhat...	52.8	51.1	57.6	42.2
Moderately/very....	34.6	26.4	25.9	28.9
Online Candidate Literature				
Not at all/not very...	52.6	65.8	56.4	58.2
Somewhat...	38.5	30.0	37.8	29.8
Moderately/very....	08.9	04.2	05.8	12.0
Online Political Issue-Oriented Sources				
Not at all/not very...	11.1	26.0	16.9	13.8
Somewhat...	50.0	49.0	50.7	35.5
Moderately/very....	38.9	25.0	32.4	50.7

Table 2

Credibility of Traditionally Delivered Information Sources
Versus
Online Counterparts

Means and Paired Samples t-scores	Believeability	Fairness	Accuracy	Depth
Newspapers	3.1	2.7	3.0	2.8
Online Newspapers	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.0
t-score	0.46	4.46*	3.21*	2.68*
TV News	2.5	2.3	2.4	1.7
Online TV News Sources	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.4
t-score	3.32*	4.46*	3.21*	6.56*
News Magazines	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.2
Online News Magazines	3.2	3.0	3.1	3.0
t-score	1.56	3.12*	1.02	-2.79*
Candidate Literature	2.2	1.9	2.2	1.7
Online Candidate Literature	2.4	2.1	2.3	2.3
t-score	3.94*	3.84*	3.16*	7.78*
Issue Oriented Sources	3.2	2.9	3.1	3.4
Online Issue Oriented Sources	3.3	3.0	3.2	2.5
t-score	0.92	2.03	1.53	2.08

*=<.025, two-tailed

Table 3

Reliance and Credibility of Traditional
and Online Information Sources

	Believeability	Fairness	Accuracy	Depth
Correlation Coefficients				
Rely on TV News TV news	.54***	.53***	.46***	.36***
Rely on Newspapers Newspapers	.35***	.34***	.34***	.29***
Rely on Radio Radio	.60***	.55***	.54***	.44***
Rely on News magazines News Magazines	.48***	.40***	.42***	.40***
Rely on Web Online newspapers	0.7	.18**	.12	.15**
Rely on Web Online TV news sources	.15	.06	.13	.26**
Rely on Web Online News Magazines	.16**	.18**	.11	.21**
Rely on Web Online Candidate Literature	.20**	.21**	.18**	.22***
Rely on Web Online issue oriented sources	.20**	.26***	.19**	.18**

>.05=*
>.01=**
>.001=***

Table 4

Demographics and Online Source Credibility

	Believeability	Fairness	Accuracy	Depth
Correlation Coefficients				
Hours per Week on Web				
Online Newspapers	.05	.019	.035	-.05
Online TV News Sources	-.09	-.09	-.13	-.01
Online News Magazines	.15*	.14	.10	.06
Online Candidate Literature	.03	-.02	-.08	-.06
Online Issue Sources	.04	-.00	.02	.08
Times Accessed the Web				
Online Newspapers	.02	-.07	-.05	-.01
Online TV News Sources	.-01	-.01	-.05	-.00
Online News magazines	.12	-.02	.00	.03
Online Candidate Literature	-.02	-.07	-.03	-.03
Online Issue Sources	.03	.01	.08	.03
Gender				
Online Newspapers	.21***	.12	.17**	.09
Online TV News Sources	.08	.11	.12	.19*
Online News magazines	.17*	.10	.23**	.16*
Online Candidate Literature	.08	.13	.19**	.17**
Online Issue Sources	.06	.12	.13	.17**
Age				
Online Newspapers	-.05	-.10	-.22***	-.27***
Online TV News Sources	-.10	-.17	-.16	-.16
Online News magazines	-.15*	-.09	-.18*	-.25***
Online Candidate Literature	-.12	-.07	-.18	-.23***
Online Issue Sources	-.06	-.01	-.03	-.19**
Education				
Online Newspapers	-.05	-.12	-.14*	-.13*
Online TV News Sources	-.12	-.09	-.12	-.16
Online News Magazines	-.12	-.07	-.15*	-.14
Online Candidate Literature	-.24***	-.26***	-.26***	-.29***
Online Issue Sources	-.19**	-.18**	-.17**	-.18**
Income				
Online Newspapers	.02	-.09	-.13*	-.18**
Online TV News Sources	.04	-.01	.05	-.03
Online News Magazines	-.07	-.05	-.09	-.21**
Online Candidate Literature	-.15**	-.16**	-.17**	-.23***
Online Issue Sources	-.03	-.03	-.01	-.14*

>.05=*
>.01=**
>.001=***

The Legitimization of Generation X:
A Case Study in Status Conferral

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The Legitimization of Generation X: A Case Study in Status Conferral

Abstract

This content analysis describes the coverage of a generational cohort and relates it to Lazarsfeld and Merton's status conferral and Strodthoff, Hawkins, and Schoenfeld's model of ideology diffusion. It studies the sources used (by age and occupation), portrayal and topics covered in magazine and newspaper articles about Generation X from 1987-1995. The coverage went through phases of disambiguation, legitimization and routinization.

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The Legitimization of Generation X: A Case Study in Status Conferral

In the early 1990s, the media that focused so intently on the cultural, political, and economic power of the so-called Baby Boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) discovered that the previously unnoticed generation born after the Baby Boomers was now entering the nation's universities, professional schools, workplace—and shopping malls. The preceding generation had first been labeled as hippies, the rock-and-roll generation, and finally, and more neutrally, the Baby Boomers. Reporters and writers in the 1990s struggled to label the new generation as well—Generation X, slackers, twentysomethings, the thirteenth generation.

The end result of these efforts by media to verify, categorize, label and define this process of recognizing people and groups, is akin to the "status conferral" described by Lazarsfeld and Merton:

> The mass media bestow prestige and enhance the authority of individuals and groups by legitimizing their status. Recognition by the press or radio or magazines or newsreels testifies that one has arrived, that one is important enough to have been singled out from the large anonymous masses, that one's behavior and opinions are significant enough to require public notice.[1]

The media legitimize people, groups and policies by recognizing them and reporting about them. People can be recognized through editorials, advertisements, or mention in routine news stories. Underlying the present research is an assumption that, by extension, legitimacy or status may also be conferred upon trends, social movements, or generational cohorts.

The rise of media attention to the generation following the baby boom offers an opportunity to examine status conferral. Moreover, patterns in media coverage of a generational cohort may also be viewed in terms of adopting the model of ideology diffusion of Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld, who argue that three phases—disambiguation, legitimization and routinization—occur as any topic receives and sustains media attention.[2] This study further suggests that media use of sources, who can range from routinely accessible community leaders to protected celebrities and invisible street people, can be studied to learn more about patterns of coverage. These patterns, in turn, will help us better understand Lazarsfeld and Merton's concept of status conferral.

Literature Review

Understanding the journalist-source relationship, and recognizing the process occurring within status conferral are two ways to begin studying status conferral at work.

Gans defined news as "information which is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists—who are both employees of bureaucratic commercial organizations and members of a profession— summarizing, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources in order to make the information suitable for their audiences." Gans recognized the strong influence of the sources on the selection of news, especially sources with the power and determination to provide information. Sources do not decide what the news is, but they clearly focus the journalist's attention. "Neither do sources alone determine the values in the news, but their values are implicit in the information they provide. Journalists do not, by any means, parrot these values, but being objective and detached, they don't rebut them either."[3]

Patterns in the types of sources selected for news articles may reflect different phases in the topic's coverage. Who the sources are may even tell us something about how the journalists selected them. Understanding these patterns requires understanding the journalist-source relationship.

Gans saw the journalist-source relationship as a tug of war—each wanting control of the message. Sources want to put themselves in the best light, while journalists "'manage' the sources in order to extract the information they want." Because sources often seek out the journalist, sources eager to provide information often win the tug of war. And the sources most eager to get their views in the news often prevail over the less determined sources. Successful sources have four traits: the ability to provide information the journalist needs, proximity to the journalist, power, and incentives.[4]

This does not mean sources have complete control over journalists. Tuchman argued that reporters make three generalizations about sources. Most sources have an "axe to grind." People in an organization who are in a position of authority can be trusted more than others in the organization, because they usually have more facts. Organizations want to protect themselves and may have procedures to do so, such as making "no comments."[5] Because of these assumptions, journalists know they must manage the sources to maintain control of a story.

Journalists have control of the selection of sources, and as Gandy noted, journalists choose sources with whom they have good relationships. "Regular contact between journalists and their sources may lead to some degree of personal identification, which may result in a hesitancy on the part of those journalists to reveal information that might harm or otherwise erect a barrier between them and their friends."

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Gandy suggested these relationships may form because of basic economic considerations. When a source has accurate information and is willing to provide information without much effort from the journalist, the source is valuable to the journalist. The sources who have been valuable in the past will be selected over unknown sources. Those sources who want to get their information to the public will provide the most valuable information.[6]

Understanding sources and their relationships with the media are important in studying status conferral. In addition, because status conferral is a process, patterns in the development of news must also be understood.

Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld studied phases in the coverage of social causes, specifically, the environmental movement, and developed the model of ideology diffusion. Though the cohort selected for examination in this study is not necessarily a social cause, it has been treated as at odds with mainstream society much as social movements are. By looking at this diffusion model, we can infer how social issues develop into news stories. Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld argue that, "Media organizations evolve through three basic adaptive phases—termed disambiguation, legitimization, and routinization—in their processing of information relevant to a maturing social cause." [7]

Disambiguation occurs when a social cause is defined and is first recognized in the media. The basic ideas of the cause are noticed at this time. When this cause becomes a social movement and gains philosophical themes, it reaches the legitimization phase. Legitimization occurs when the media recognize that the ideas of this movement become valid topics for coverage. The third phase, routinization, is reached when news content about the movement is in the media on a regular basis. There could be a change in format to consistently cover this movement, or there could be an administrative decision to include the movement as regular news content.[8]

Gitlin found that when a movement is covered by the media, the movement's image is influenced by the media's images. "Media certify leaders and officially noteworthy 'personalities'; indeed, they are able to convert leadership into celebrity, something quite different." He also noted that the media restrict a movement's presence by only showing flamboyant leaders or other items that make "good copy." But they also "amplify the issues which fuel these same movements."[9]

On the other hand, Tuchman noted that if people are absent, condemned or trivialized by the media, they are "subject to symbolic annihilation."[10] People symbolically become "nothing" through the media's non-treatment of them.

These studies suggest that the media influence the public perception of social causes by painting an image of the cause for the public. What kind of image does the media paint about the cohort called Generation X? A snapshot of the media coverage may not tell the whole story. But by looking at several years of coverage, we better understand the images that the media presented and the phases that the images underwent. Those phases, in turn, help us understand the process of status conferral.

Study Questions

The coverage of the cohort called Generation X is arguably similar to the coverage of social movements in that the media plays a major role in establishing or defining all groups for the public. However, coverage of social movements is different from coverage of a cohort in that the cohort did not seek the coverage as many social movements do. So, at the beginning of its coverage,

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journalists could not rely on official sources representing the cohort. The cohort was not an organized group with leaders and it did not have a name for itself. Because of no group identity or leader, journalists had to find their own sources for information. Some went to marketers, members of the cohort and researchers. The main question we will study is: How did sources influence the coverage of Generation X?

Specifically, the following research questions (RQ) were posed.

RQ 1—What kinds of sources were used in the coverage of Generation X?

RQ 2—What topics were covered in the articles?

RQ 3—Was there a positive or negative portrayal of Generation X?

RQ 4—Were there differences in the coverage between trade and consumer magazines and newspapers? (e.g. differences in sources used, topics covered, or type of portrayal)

RQ 5—Did the coverage go through phases of disambiguation, legitimization, and routinization?

Method

Content analysis of magazines and newspapers was used to explain the trends in coverage of Generation X from January 1987 to December 1995. This nine-year time span covered a few years before the term Generation X was created (1991)[11], so that early articles could be compared to articles at the height (1993) of Generation X coverage.

The magazine portion of the study included both trade and consumer magazines in the United States, as compiled in the CD-ROM databases of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and the *Business Periodicals Index.*

All magazine articles indexed under the keyword "Generation X" were selected. Though the term "Generation X" was not used in the earlier years of the study period, the CD-ROM indices used it as a keyword for searches, even in articles that were written before the identifier was used. Therefore, this search reached a broad list of articles.

The newspaper part of the study investigated coverage of the cohort in five newspapers: *The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Atlanta Constitution*, and *Wall Street Journal*. The first four were selected because of their size and because they represent different regions of the United States. The *Wall Street Journal* was selected for its size and its business focus, parallel to the use of trade magazines in the magazine sample.

All newspaper articles indexed in *Newspaper Abstracts* under the keyword "Generation X" were selected. This keyword was recognized in 1994 and 1995. However, the keyword was not recognized by *Newspaper Abstracts* in previous years, and thus, newspaper articles appearing prior to 1994 were selected using the keyword "generation." The abstracts of those articles were read to determine which articles were related to the cohort. There were 116 articles from *Business Periodicals Index* and 120 articles from *Reader's Guide*.

Articles were coded as trade or consumer magazine articles.

Sources cited were also coded. For this study, a source was defined as any person who was quoted or paraphrased by a journalist in an article. Documents and unidentified sources were not used for this study. Four source "age" categories were used: Generation X, Baby Boomer, person of another generation, and undeterminable age. Because journalists and demographers do not agree on the exact birth years of the different generations, members of Generation X and the Baby Boom generation were defined in terms of the article coded. For

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example, if the author described Generation X as being people in their twenties, then a thirty-year-old person would be considered a Baby Boomer.

Sources were also categorized by occupation or type—government; business; non-business researcher (which included academics, media sources, psychologists, etc.); unspecified (if the source's occupation was not provided in the article); and other (if a source's occupation was provided, but it did not fit any of the above categories)—all of which were exclusive of each other. The study does not compare the dominance or prominence of sources, in terms of "how much" of each story they provided. Each source was coded only once, even if named more than once in an article. Comparisons about dominance of one source type in relation to another were possible, however, because the number of sources in different source categories were counted. After tallying the number of sources by type and by generational cohort, the coder recorded the total number of sources in each category.

Portrayal of Generation X and Baby Boomers was positive, negative or neutral in the articles.

The final variable, "topics covered," was operationalized to allow the coder to indicate all the different topics covered in the article. Examples of "topics covered" were: "How to Market to Generation X," "Lifestyles of Generation X" and "Work Ethic of Generation X," among others.

Reliability ranged from 82.9% for "Portrayal of Generation X" and "Portrayal of Baby Boomers" to 100% for "Article Title" and "Magazine Title." "Topics" was 92.6% and "Sources" was 97.4%. Overall, intercoder reliability was 95.4% based on percentage of agreement. The level of significance selected for this study was .05.[12]

Results

The articles published in the sampled 88 media during the time period 1987 to 1995, and located using the operational procedure noted above, yielded a total of 458 articles, 236 from magazines and 222 from newspapers. The magazine articles were in 83 different magazines; *Advertising Age* carried 23, more than any other magazine. By contrast, the five newspapers selected for the study yielded over 25 articles each, while three of them carried more than 50 articles during the time period.

The articles are divided into trade or consumer periodicals. There were more than twice as many consumer (314) as trade (144) publication article. Because the division of trade and consumer publications is unequal, especially in newspapers, and because there were no significant differences between trade and consumer publications, this variable was not used for crosstabulations.

Sources Used in Cohort Coverage

RQ 1: What kinds of sources were used in the coverage of Generation X? The sources used in the articles of this study are presented in Table 1, controlling for age of cohort and occupation.

Almost 45% of the total sources were members of Generation X, while the other age groups collectively constituted more than 55% of the sources. Because of the relative infrequency of two categories in the initial four-category system (Baby Boomers, 5.2%, and other generation, 1.4%), the two non-Generation X categories were combined with Undetermined Age (48.5%) to form an "Other" category.

The sources were also coded for their occupation. The coding procedure allowed coders initially to categorize sources as Business Source, Government

Table 1
Sources covered in articles on Generation X by Cohort, Occupation, and Periodical Type

a. Source Cohort

	f	%
Generation X	869	44.7
Other	1,077	55.3
Total	1,946	100.0%

b. Source Occupation

Business Sources	828	42.5
Researcher/Government Sources	716	36.8
Non-expert Sources	402	20.7
Total	1,946	100.0%

c. Age by Occupation

Cohort:	**Generation X**	**Other**
Occupation:		
Business Sources	35.4%	48.3%
Researcher/Government Sources	24.1%	47.1%
Non-expert Sources	40.5%	4.6%
Total	100.0% **n=869**	100.0% **n=1,077**

p < .05; df=2; Chi Square=415.96

Table 1
(continued)

d. Source Cohort by Occupation and Periodical Type

	Periodical Type:			
	Magazine		**Newspaper**	
Cohort:	**Generation X**	**Other**	**Generation X**	**Other**
Occupation:				
Business	42.5%	57.8%	23.2%	36.2%
Researcher/ Government	23.3%	38.6%	25.4%	57.9%
Non-Expert	34.2%	3.6%	51.4%	5.9%
Total	100.0% **n=550**	100.0% **n=604**	100.0% **n=319**	100.0% **n=473**

p < .05; df=6; Chi Square=489.85

Source, Researcher, Unspecified Source, or Other. However, because so few sources were in the Government and Other categories, this five-category system was collapsed. Table 1b shows the collapsed categories. Because more than one source could be in each article, there are more sources (1,946) than articles (458).

Business Sources were the most frequently cited, accounting for nearly half (42.5%) of the sources. Researchers and Government Sources constituted more than a third (36.8%) of the sources. The Non-Expert Sources constituted a fifth (20.7%) of the sources.

Table 1c also shows a significant association between source age and occupation (chi-square=415.96, 2 df, $p < .05$). A plurality of the Generation X sources were Non-Experts (40.5%); however, sources in the "Other" age group were primarily Business (48.3%) and Researcher/Government sources (47.1%). Only one in 20 from the "Other" age group was from the "Non-Experts" category that dominated Generation X sources. Thus, as might be expected, stories about Generation X tended to be dominated by Non-Generation X sources (1,077 to 869) from business and the academy.

The age-occupation association differed by periodical type. Table 1d shows that newspapers used even more Researcher/Government (57.9%) sources from the "Other" generations than magazines (38.6%); recall the overall percent in 1c was 47.1%. And while Non-Experts among Generation X sources were dominant overall (40.5%) and for newspapers (51.4%), a plurality of magazine Generation X sources were Business Sources (42.5%).

There were also differences between periodical types for the "Other" cohort. A majority of the Other cohort sources in magazines were Business Sources (57.8%), a proportion parallel to Other cohort sources when the periodicals were combined (48.3%). However, Business Sources in newspapers constituted only a third of the Other cohort (36.2%). The inverse occurred with Researcher/Government Sources; in magazines, a little more than a third of the Other cohort were Researcher/Government Sources, but over half of the Other cohort in newspapers were Researcher/Government Sources (57.9%).

Topics Covered in Stories

RQ 2: What topics were covered in the articles? Table 2a lists the topics covered in the stories and how many stories covered that topic. Stories usually covered more than one topic, so more topics than stories are indicated.

The topic "Lifestyles of Non-Celebrity Cohort Members" (24.5%) was the most frequent topic, with over twice as many occurrences as the second-ranked topic, "How Companies are Already Marketing the Cohort" (12.1%). The remaining categories each constituted less than 11 percent of the topics covered. Because of the infrequency of articles with coverage of these topics, these topics were collapsed to form the six categories in Table 2b.

There were significant differences when the stories are divided by periodical type (chi square=67.12, 5 df, $p < .05$). Table 2c shows the differences. "Lifestyles of Non-Celebrities" (32.8%) was the most frequent topic used in newspapers, with nearly a third of the topics. Magazines, on the other hand, focused on business topics, such as "Marketing" (25.2%) and "Financial Situation" (23.0%). This is logical in view of the media sampled. Half of the magazines sampled were trade magazines, while only one-tenth of the newspaper articles were trade publications.

Table 2
Topics in Stories on Generation X, by Portrayal of Generation X, by Periodical Type

a. Topics

	# of Stories	**%**
Lifestyles of Non-celebrity Cohort Members	223	24.5
How Companies are Marketing the Cohort	110	12.1
Financial Problems of the Cohort	95	10.5
Fashion, Beauty and Style of the Cohort	86	9.5
Negative Personality Traits of the Cohort	74	8.1
Positive Personality Traits of the Cohort	62	6.8
Financial Opportunities for the Cohort	59	6.5
How to Market to the Cohort	46	5.1
Work Ethic of the Cohort	38	4.2
Lifestyles of Celebrity Cohort Members	26	2.9
What the Cohort Thinks of Being a Marketing Target	24	2.6
Size of the Cohort	17	1.9
Other	49	5.4
Total	909	100.1%*

*Column does not add to 100 because of rounding.

b. Collapsed Topics

	# of Stories	**%**
Lifestyles	223	24.5
Marketing	197	21.7
Finances	192	21.1
Personality	136	15.0
Fashion/Celebrities	112	12.3
Other	49	5.4
Total	909*	100.0

*Total exceeds story total of 458 because multiple topics were coded.

Table 2
(continued)

c. Topics Covered by Periodical Type	**Magazines**	**Newspapers**
Lifestyles	18.7%	32.8%
Marketing	25.1%	16.8%
Finances	23.0%	18.4%
Personality	19.7%	8.3%
Fashion/Celebrities	7.9%	18.7%
Other	5.6%	5.1%
Total	100.0%	100.1%*
	n=534	**n=375**

p < .05; df=5; Chi Square=67.12

* Column does not add to 100% because of rounding.

d. Portrayal of Generation X	**# of Stories**	**%**
Positive	229	49.9
Negative	86	18.7
Neutral	143	31.2
Total	458	99.8*

*Column does not add to 100 because of rounding.

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Table 2
(continued)

e. Portrayal of Generation X by Topics Covered

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Lifestyles	25.2%	26.3%	21.6%
Marketing	21.7%	12.1%	29.5%
Finances	26.8%	15.8%	13.2%
Personality	14.2%	27.9%	5.7%
Fashion/Celebrities	8.1%	14.2%	19.8%
Other	3.9%	3.7%	10.1%
Total	99.9%*	100%	99.9%*
	n=492	**n=190**	**n=227**

$p < .05$; df=10; Chi Square=97.39
* Columns do not add to 100% because of rounding.

f. Portrayal of Generation X by Periodical Type

	Magazines	Newspapers
Positive	53.0%	46.8%
Negative	18.6%	18.9%
Neutral	28.4%	34.2%
Total	100%	99.9%*
	n=236	**n=222**

$p = .348$; df=2; Chi Square=2.11
* Column does not add to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2
(continued)

g. Topics by Portrayal of Generation X by Periodical Type

	Magazines			Newspapers		
	Pos.	**Neg.**	**Neut.**	**Pos.**	**Neg.**	**Neut.**
Lifestyles	19.4%	21.2%	14.7%	35.4%	32.6%	28.8%
Marketing	24.2%	14.4%	37.1%	17.4%	9.3%	21.6%
Finances	29.6%	14.4%	12.9%	21.9%	17.4%	13.5%
Personality	18.2%	33.7%	11.2%	7.3%	20.9%	0.0%
Fashion	4.5%	14.4%	11.2%	14.6%	14.0%	28.8%
Other	4.1%	1.9%	12.9%	3.4%	5.8%	7.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	99.9%*
	n=314	**n=104**	**n=116**	**n=178**	**n=86**	**n=111**

(magazine) $p < .05$; df=10; Chi Square=68.97
(newspaper) $p < .05$; df=10; Chi Square=44.93
*Column does not add to 100 because of rounding.

Portrayal of the Cohort

RQ 3: Was there a positive or negative portrayal of Generation X? Stories on Generation X were coded for their portrayal of the cohort, and overall, the portrayal is not negative. Table 2d shows that over four-fifths (81.1%) of the articles are either positive (49.9%) or neutral (31.2%). Few articles featured a negative portrayal (18.7%). The articles that deviated from the neutrality norm tended to be positive.

Table 2e crosstabulates portrayal of the cohort with the topics covered. Articles with all three portrayals gave heavy emphasis to "Lifestyles," constituting nearly a quarter of each type of portrayal. However, articles with a positive portrayal tended to focus on "Financial Situation" (26.8%), articles with a negative portrayal covered "Personality Traits" (27.9%), and articles with a neutral portrayal focused on "Marketing" (29.5%).

As suggested by RQ 4, we can also look at the portrayal of the cohort in the different periodical types. Table 2f shows no significant difference between magazines and newspapers in portrayal of the cohort (chi square=2.11, 2 df, p = .348). In both magazines and newspapers, about half of the articles were positive, less than a fifth were negative and approximately one-third were neutral. Any differences between periodical types found earlier in the study did not influence the portrayal. Instead, the coverage was consistent across different media.

Table 2g examines topics covered in magazine and newspaper articles and portrayal in those articles, controlled for media. In positive magazine articles, "Financial Situation" (29.6%) and "Marketing" (24.2%) led the list of topics covered. However, positive newspaper articles focused on "Lifestyles of Non-Celebrities" (35.4%) and "Financial Situation" (21.9%). "Lifestyles of Non-Celebrities" was covered so heavily in newspapers that it constituted approximately a third of topics covered in all three areas of portrayal—positive, negative, and neutral portrayal.

Topics were very different in the magazine stories. Unlike newspapers, "Lifestyles of Non-Celebrities" was not used as often when crosstabulated with portrayal of Generation X. In negative magazine stories, "Personality Traits" (33.7%) led the topics, while in stories with a neutral portrayal, "Marketing" (37.1%) was the leader.

Changes over Time

RQ 5: Did the coverage go through phases of disambiguation, legitimization, and routinization? To look at this question, the coverage throughout different time periods, or phases was studied.

Except for a decline in the second and third years of the study, there was a steady increase in articles written about this cohort, as shown in Table 3a. There were 22 articles during 1987, the first year of the study. Then the number dropped to seven and nine in the following years before rising again. This large number the first year can be explained by several 1987 *American Demographics* articles about the cohort's many job opportunities. These and other periodical articles suggested that the young generation would find many job opportunities in the future. Because the economy had been accustomed to a large number of new workers each year during the Baby Boom generation, when the smaller sized generation entered the work force there would be many jobs available. In fact, worker shortages were predicted. These kinds of stories were trendy for a few months in 1987, because some demographic studies had been performed, then few articles were written about the generation in the following two years.

Table 3
Articles on Generation X, by Year

a. Year	*f*	%
1987	22	4.8
1988	7	1.5
1989	9	2.0
1990	22	4.8
1991	24	5.2
1992	46	10.0
1993	83	18.1
1994	124	27.1
1995	121	26.4
Total	458	99.9%*

*Column does not add to 100% because of rounding

b. Collapsed Time Periods	*f*	%
1987-1990	60	13.1%
1991-1992	70	15.3%
1993	83	18.1%
1994	124	27.1%
1995	121	26.4%
Total	458	100%

Table 3
(continued)

c. Time Periods	**Magazines**		**Newspapers**	
	f	%	*f*	%
1987-1990	23	9.7%	37	16.7%
1991-1992	33	14.0%	37	16.7%
1993	47	19.9%	36	16.2%
1994	62	26.3%	62	27.9%
1995	71	30.1%	50	22.5%
Total	236	100%	222	100%

The number of articles increased again in 1990, the year of the *Time* "Twentysomething: Proceeding with Caution" article that seemed to spark many other articles on this cohort.[13] Then there was a steady increase until 1994, when the number of articles reached its peak. Clear evidence of a trend appears throughout the years of the study. However, to conduct two-way analysis with other variables, it was necessary to collapse the years into statistically sound phases.

The first phase, 1987 through 1990, presented the emerging stories about the cohort in a time when the cohort had not been given a name and was not a trendy topic. The next phase, 1991 through 1992, reflected the first large growth of stories. During this phase, the book *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* was published.[14] The third phase, 1993, saw continued growth in the coverage of the cohort, while the fourth phase, 1994, found the peak in stories. And the fifth phase, 1995, recognized stability rather than growth in the coverage. Table 3 shows the collapsed phases.

By analyzing these phases by periodical type, we see slight differences between the periodical types at the beginning and end of the study, but the middle years are very similar. A slightly higher percentage of articles from newspapers (16.7%) than magazines (9.7%) were written during the first phase. And in the last two phases, magazines continued to have a small growth in the number of Generation X articles (26.3% to 30.1%), while articles in newspapers declined (27.9% to 22.5%).

Sources Change through the Phases

Source cohorts changed across the five phases, as shown in Table 4a. In the first phase, Generation X constituted less than a third (29.3%) of the sources, but

Table 4
Source Cohort; Source Occupation; Portrayal of Generation X; and Topics Covered, by Time Periods

a. Generational Sources		1987-90	1991-92	1993	1994	1995
Generation X	*f*	84	130	162	268	225
	%	29.3%	42.8%	45.3%	50.6%	48.2%
Other	*f*	203	174	196	262	242
	%	70.7%	57.2%	54.7	49.4%	51.8%
Total	*f*	287	304	358	530	467
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$p < .05$; df=4; Chi Square=37.37

b. Occupations		1987-90	1991-92	1993	1994	1995
Business	*f*	111	92	156	232	237
	%	38.7%	30.3%	43.6%	43.8%	50.8%
Researcher/ Government	*f*	145	120	129	180	142
	%	50.5%	39.5%	36.0%	34.0%	30.4%
Non-Expert	*f*	31	92	73	118	88
	%	10.8%	30.3%	20.4%	22.3%	18.8%
Total	*f*	287	304	358	530	467
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$p < .05$; df=8; Chi Square=68.56

Table 4
(continued)

c. Portrayal of Generation X		**1987-90**	**1991-92**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**
Positive	*f*	27	28	36	61	77
	%	45.0%	40.0%	43.4%	49.2%	63.6%
Negative	*f*	13	12	21	30	10
	%	21.7%	17.1%	25.3%	24.2%	8.3%
Neutral	*f*	20	30	26	33	34
	%	33.3%	42.9%	31.3%	26.6%	28.1%
Total	*f*	60	70	83	124	121
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

$p < .05$; df=8; Chi Square = 22.59

d. Topics Covered		**1987-90**	**1991-92**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**
Lifestyles	*f*	25	35	46	60	57
	%	22.1%	26.5%	26.4%	23.3%	24.6%
Marketing	*f*	25	23	38	50	61
	%	22.1%	17.4%	21.8%	19.4%	26.3%
Finances	*f*	32	34	31	53	42
	%	28.3%	25.8%	17.8%	20.5%	18.1%
Personality	*f*	9	17	34	41	35
	%	8.0%	12.9%	19.5%	15.9%	15.1%
Fashion/Celebrities	*f*	9	16	15	44	28
	%	8.0%	12.1%	8.6%	17.1%	12.1%
Other	*f*	13	7	10	10	9
	%	11.5%	5.3%	5.7%	3.9%	3.9%
Total	*f*	113	132	174	258	232
	%	100%	100%	99.8%*	100.1%	100.1%*

$p < .05$; df=20; Chi Square=36.00

*Some columns do not add to 100% because of rounding.

rose to about half of them during the remaining years, peaking at 50.6% in 1994. The fourth phase was the only phase in which the cohort was a majority of the sources. The distribution of sources in the last two phases, with both Generation X and Other cohorts being close to the 50% mark, shows stability.

Other changes occurred in Source Occupation across the five phases, as shown in Table 4b. During the first phase, Researcher/Government sources constituted over half (50.5%) of the sources, while Business sources were 38.7%. The three occupation areas contributed similar sources in the second phase, then Business sources represented the plurality of sources during the final three phases. All three occupations remained steady across the final three phases as the coverage reached its peak and stability. Business sources were around the 50% range, Researcher/Government sources remained in the lower to mid-30% range, and Non-Experts were around 20%. This consistency shows stability among the stories that was not found in the earlier phases of coverage.

Portrayals Change through the Phases

The portrayal of Generation X remained steady in three of the five phases, as shown in Table 4a. In the first, third and fourth phases, about 45% of the stories had a positive portrayal, over 20% had a negative portrayal and about 30% had a neutral portrayal. In the second phase, however, nearly half of the articles had a neutral portrayal (42.9%), while negative portrayal decreased to 17.1%. More dramatic changes occurred in the fifth phase, when nearly two-thirds of the articles had a positive portrayal (63.6%), and fewer than one-tenth had a negative portrayal (8.3%).

Recall that phase two of our study not only had a large number of neutral portrayals, but also contained many Non-Expert sources and was experiencing its first years of growth. In addition, phase five, which had a more positive portrayal of the cohort, also saw stability in the sources used.

Topics Change through the Phases

Topics changed across the coverage of this cohort, as shown in Table 4d. In the first phase, "Financial Situation" was the most frequently used topic (28.3%), as stories focused on the great job opportunities that demographers expected for this cohort.

In the second through fourth phases, "Lifestyles of Non-Celebrities" became the most covered topic at about a quarter of the topics. "Financial Situation" was also used often in the second and fourth phases. However, the third phase saw a decrease in the use of "Financial Situation," while "Marketing" (21.8%) and "Personality Traits" (19.5%) were more often mentioned topics.

The fourth-ranked topic in the fourth phase was "Fashion & Celebrities." Though it only constituted 17.1% of the topics in phase four, this phase is where the topic was most often used. Much of the increase is due to articles on new movies and musical groups that targeted the cohort.

Though "Lifestyles of Non-celebrities" was the leading topic in three of the phases, "Marketing" was the topic used most often in the fifth phase (26.3%). Karen Ritchie's book, *Marketing to Generation X* was published during this phase and brought an increased coverage of marketing.[15] In addition to the change toward more discussion of marketing, there was much stability in topics covered from the fourth to the fifth phases, because the other topics did not go through dramatic changes.

Discussion

This study set out to describe the coverage of a generational cohort and relate it to status conferral and ideology diffusion. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to determine public attitudes toward the cohort, the research paints a picture of the cohort as its coverage changed over time. That coverage, in turn, may influence their attitudes.

Data on sources, portrayal and topics throughout these phases of coverage may be interpreted in terms of the process or model of ideology diffusion proposed by Strodthoff, Hawkins and Schoenfeld. That process involves three phases, disambiguation, legitimization and routinization. Early coverage of Generation X saw a few stories, then the cohort gained coverage and a definition in the disambiguation phase. Legitimization occurred as the cohort became an increasingly frequent topic in the media and routinization began as the coverage stabilized. In other words, like much of learning, a label is placed on something, then people find out all about it. Soon that label, and all the meaning associated with it, is a routine part of our lexicon and usage.

The view of Generation X presented in media coverage changed across the time period studied. At the beginning of its coverage, it was identified by its relationship to the Baby Boomers or by contrasting it with that older cohort. Demographers and other researchers were the news sources quoted, and served to define Generation X. In the second phase, members of the cohort were used more often as sources, providing an alternative, perhaps more valid, insight into the cohort's "culture." This move away from demographers' terms was like a move away from black and white photos to full-color, even moving, pictures. In short, it was a move from mere definition to establishment of an unambiguous identity. Most important, it was identification based in some part on the words of

Generation Xers themselves. By the third phase, the range of sources and topics, as well as the passage of time, saw the cohort as a "legitimate" phenomenon, rather than media-created pseudo-phenomenon. The cohort was worthy of serious consideration. Finally, through continued and protracted coverage, the sources, topics and portrayal rendered Generation X "routine." "Generation X" had gone from being a demographer's or media's buzz word tagged to a cohort, to a label that subsumed a constellation of attitudes and traits, to become the layman's symbol for a generation.

Of course this view of the emergence of Generation X following the process of "ideology diffusion" is only tentatively proposed. Indeed, we might question whether the media actually identified an existing "subculture," or created it by naming it. A different view of the cohort's definition and identity might be possible. Rather than a subculture, Generation X might be a "market," and its identification as a phenomenon reflective of market savvy.

Ironically, the issue of Generation X as "subculture" or "social movement" versus "marketing creation" typifies the contrast of Generation X to its predecessor. Baby Boomers were linked to a wide array of events and movements that helped identify and legitimize them as a force: Civil Rights, the Vietnam War peace movement, and the "drug culture." With Generation X, however, there were no social movements to lead it through the phases. Perhaps, instead of being identified with a social movement, Generation X's identity rests both in what it is not—Baby Boomers—and what it can buy.

Decisions

Decisions about the media studied in this research no doubt affected the results. Both magazines and newspapers were selected for comparison purposes.

However, the public receives information from other media too. So to see a complete image of the Generation X coverage, other media, including television, books, computers and all forms of advertising, should have been included.

Perhaps too few media were selected. But on the other hand, perhaps one medium would have been sufficient. It is interesting to see the difference between Generation X coverage in newspapers and magazines, but there are so many differences between the two media that the study may not have been fair in its comparisons. Magazines are audience driven and are aimed at specific audiences. Newspapers, however, have more general audiences. A decision had to made as to the media studied, and the media selected provided variety without becoming unmanageable.

Conclusion

What will happen to this so-called Generation X? The Baby Boomers earlier were called hippies and yuppies, but later gained a more neutral title—Baby Boomers—and have become firmly entrenched in the middle class they sought to escape, shock and reform during their youth. Will the same happen to Generation X? When the younger cohort reaches middle age, will it be called Generation X, the Diverse Generation, Post-Boomers, or the Lost Generation? Is there some as yet unknown event that will come to characterize them as indelibly as their elders? It is nice to think that a more neutral title will be selected.

On the other hand, the cohort may lose its identity. Just because the cohort evolved into a routine news phenomenon does not mean it will have the enduring definition of label applied to its elder cohort. The Baby Boomers are an

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amazing demographic phenomenon because of size of cohort. Generation X, however, is a smaller generation and may not have that same influence.

Though the term Generation X may disappear, the people in Generation X, or course, will not. The cohort may not be a "social movement," and it may not be defined in terms of a social event or period, but regardless of the labels given by demographers, marketers and journalists, it will fall to historians to provide the definitive identity to Generation X.

Notes

1 Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," in *Mass Communications*, Wilbur Schramm, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1960): 498.

2 Glenn G. Strodthoff, Robert P. Hawkins, and A. Clay Schoenfeld, "Media Roles in a Social Movement: A Model of Ideology Diffusion," *Journal of Communication* 35 (Spring 1985): 134-36.

3 Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1979), 78-80, 145.

4 Gans, *Deciding What's News*, 117-118.

5 Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (NY: The Free Press, 1978), 93.

6 Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *Beyond Agenda Setting* (Norwood, N.J., 1982), 11.

7 Strodthoff, Hawkins, and Schoenfeld, "Media Roles in a Social Movement: A Model of Ideology Diffusion," 134-36.

8 Strodthoff, Hawkins, and Schoenfeld, "Media Roles in a Social Movement: A Model of Ideology Diffusion," 134-36.

9 Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 3-4.

10 Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media" in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels and James Benét, ed., (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 8-11.

11 The term Generation X first began as the title of a book by Douglas Coupland. The book, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture,* was a fiction book about three young people. Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture,* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

12 Guido H. Stempel III and Bruce H. Westley, eds., *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, 2nd ed, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), 132-133.

13 David M. Gross and Sophfronia Scott, "Twentysomething: Proceeding With Caution," *Time,* 16 July 1990, 56.

14 Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.*

15 Karen Ritchie, *Marketing to Generation X,* (NY: Lexington Books, 1995).